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“A Damned Mob of Scribbling Women”: Affective Labour in British and American Fiction, 1848-1915

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2015

Abstract

This thesis examines literary representations of women's work in British and American fiction written and published between 1848 and 1915. It introduces and explores the concept of affective labour to bring to light and evaluate the previously overlooked labours of women in fiction. Adopting the lens of affective labour, the study seeks to focus on the ways in which women strive for self-fulfilment through forms of emotional, mental and creative endeavour that have not always been fully appreciated as 'work' in critical accounts of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century fiction. The thesis both reconsiders some well-established and well-known novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, George Gissing, and Arnold Bennett, and introduces some less familiar work by women writers of the time. Many critical studies of nineteenth-century fiction have concentrated on American fiction or British fiction exclusively. This thesis has a strong transatlantic emphasis, as well as a determination to look at both canonical and non-canonical writings. It has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to demonstrate the aim of women's affective labours in the struggle for self-fulfilment. Secondly, in showing how powerful narratives are generated by a persistent concern with affective labour, the thesis seeks to re-evaluate and re-establish some valuable but largely forgotten or neglected works of female British and American writers. Accordingly, the thesis also attempts, where possible, to record significant changes in the reception history of each novel. The thesis is separated into two sections, Section One (Chapters 1-5) examines British fiction, and Section Two (Chapters 6-9) explores the work of American woman writers of antebellum and post-bellum fiction.

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Introduction

A woman who wrote used to be considered a sort of monster. At this day it is difficult to find one who does not write, or has not written, or who has not, at least, a strong desire to do so. Gridirons and darning-needles are getting monotonous. A part of their time the women of to-day are content to devote their consideration when necessary; but you will rarely find one—at least among women who *think*—who does not silently rebel against allowing them a monopoly.

What? You inquire, would you encourage, in the present overcrowded state of the literary market, any more women scribblers? Stop a bit. It does not follow that she should wish or seek to give the world what she has written. I look around and see innumerable women, to whose barren, loveless life this would be improvement and solace, and I say to them, write! Write, if it will make that life brighter, happier, or less monotonous. Write! it will be a safe outlet for thoughts and feelings....

Fanny Fern, "The Women of 1867"¹

The extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman. It is only when we know what were the conditions of the average woman's life—the number of her children, whether she had money of her own, if she had a room to herself, if she had servants, whether part of the housework was her task—it is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as a writer....

Strange spaces of silence seem to separate one period of activity from another....

Law and custom were of course largely responsible for these strange intermissions of silence and speech....

Thus it is clear that the extraordinary outburst of fiction in the beginning of the nineteenth century in England was heralded by innumerable slight changes in law and customs and manners.

Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction"²

Why did women face so many difficulties when trying to be considered as serious writers?

And why are some women writers still not fully appreciated or adequately represented on

canons of literary study? In the passages above, Fanny Fern and Virginia Woolf reveal

important sentiments on the subject of the woman writer. For Fern, writing was an escape—a

¹ "The Women of 1867," *New York Ledger* [New York] 10 Aug. 1867, rpt. in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 342-3.

² "Women and Fiction," *The Forum* [New York] Mar. 1929, rpt. in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. Michele Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979) 44-5.

way for women to overcome the tedium of culturally prescribed labours, and improve the quality of their lives. Yet, women in the literary marketplace were not met with enthusiasm. As Woolf points out, “the extraordinary outburst of fiction in the beginning of the nineteenth century in England was heralded by innumerable slight changes in law and customs and manners.” Although women writers eventually became widely accepted, it is still important to remember that they were once regarded as mere “women scribblers.”

I initially began this thesis as a study of neglected British and American women writers who have been excluded from the literary canon. I wanted to recover and re-evaluate their works to show their artistry and complexity, and establish that they were of a similar calibre to those of male contemporaries. Over time, and after much research, the project evolved into a study that would be inherently stronger if it included both men and women writers, and both part of, and excluded by, the canon; not because the forgotten texts are inferior to those that are now considered classic, but because texts such as Mary Austin’s *Woman of Genius* are as complex as Edith Wharton’s *A House of Mirth*. As a result, I have examined works by George Gissing and Arnold Bennett, alongside prolific women writers such as Edith Wharton and Willa Cather, and even the forgotten novelists, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Mary Austin. By encompassing such a wide spectrum of works, my thesis has become a comprehensive and transatlantic study of women’s fiction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Scholarship on nineteenth-century literature continues to be a popular and a burgeoning field of study.³ Nina Baym, Anne E. Boyd, Susan K. Harris, Linda Huf, Karen L.

³ For studies of British fiction, see Joe Bray, *The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Robert L. Caserio, and Clement Hawes, eds., *The Cambridge History of the English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012); Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005); Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel* Vol. I & II (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970). For studies of American fiction, see Gregg Crane, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Robert Paul Lamb, and G.R. Thompson,

Kilcup, and Elaine Showalter, are just a few of the scholars who have written about the forgotten nineteenth-century novels by American women.⁴ Similarly, Gail Cunningham, Ann Heilmann, Ellen Moers, Mary Poovey, and Lyn Pykett have considered various aspects of the Victorian novel.⁵ Although all of these critics have provided many insightful interpretations of literary works, within this domain of British and American fiction, I am interested in the importance of work, specifically women's work.

One of the major developments in the depiction of work is Raymond Williams' study of the English novel. In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, Williams examines the ways in which the Industrial Revolution affected literary tradition. By focusing on a small period of time—the 1840s—Williams comprehensively demonstrates how the changes in economy, urban development, and labour influenced English novelists and their works. For example, when considering Thomas Hardy, Williams focuses on the depiction of farming and other agricultural labours; similarly, in Charles Dickens' fiction, various patterns of industrial labour and urban settings are of importance.

It is evident that Williams' contribution is especially valuable. In the past, areas of labour, especially labour in the non-traditional sense, have not always been documented in criticism. Using an approach similar to that of Williams, my thesis will focus on evaluating literary works through the lens of affective labour. My project will examine a range of

eds., *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865-1914* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Brian Lee, *American Fiction, 1865-1940* (London: Longman, 1987).

⁴ See Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978); Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004); Susan K. Harris, *19th-century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); Linda Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (New York: F. Ungar Publications, 1983); Karen L. Kilcup, ed, *Nineteenth-century American Women Writers: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2010).

⁵ See Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (London: Women's Press, 1978); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989); Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992).

novels, some well-known, others less so, some part of the literary canon, others excluded, so that enhanced readings will be possible, and new insights will be gained.

It is first imperative to understand the relation between labour and work. In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams comprehensively defines both terms. Work refers to anything having to do with “paid employment,” specifically as “‘steady’ or timed work, or working for a wage or salary.”⁶ On the other hand, labour has a more complicated meaning. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, labour had to do with “ploughing or working the land, but also extended to other kinds of manual work and to any kind of difficult effort.”⁷ This definition altered with the Industrial Revolution and capitalism. According to Williams, “where labour, in its most general use, had meant all productive work, it now came to mean that element of production which in combination with capital and materials produced commodities.”⁸ Under these definitions, labour correlates to any employment that produces capital. While this may seem a simple demarcation, it is problematic in that it largely ignores the unpaid labours of women, i.e. housework and child rearing. To represent and recognise these labours, I use an entirely separate term: affective labour.

The idea of affective or immaterial labour in relation to capitalism, was first defined and discussed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in numerous works.⁹ According to Hardt and Negri in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, with industrialization came “what has been traditionally called ‘women’s work;’”¹⁰ this has been previously described as “caring labour, kin work, nurturing and maternal activities.”¹¹ In Hardt’s essay

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988) 335.

⁷ Williams 176.

⁸ Williams 177.

⁹ For information on a capitalist society and immaterial labour, see Michael Hardt’s essay “Affective Labour,” *Boundary 2* 26. 2 (1999): 89-100; Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, “Value and Affect,” *Boundary 2* 26. 2 (1999): 77-88; Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (London: Harvard UP, 2000).

¹⁰ Hardt, and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 110.

¹¹ Hardt, “Affective Labour” 97.

“Affective Labour,” affective/immaterial labour is defined as a “labour... that produces an immaterial good, such as service, knowledge, or communication.”¹² Moreover this labour deals with “tasks that involve ‘problem-solving [and] problem- identifying.’”¹³ Thus, affective labour also encompasses activities of the mind: that is planning, or strategizing for one’s future. Otherwise coined by feminist writers as “labour in the bodily mode,”¹⁴ or even emotional labour, affective labour can also involve “producing affects, relationships and forms of communication and cooperation among children, in the family, and in the community.”¹⁵

A further definition of affective labour is offered by Maurizio Lazzarato in “Immaterial Labour.” He concludes that “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions [as well as] tastes”¹⁶ are immaterial labour. Activities such as singing, painting, and writing, are all affective not only because they use the emotional, creative and imaginative faculties of the mind, and because they create art by exercising skills: “intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labour; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of which they are part.”¹⁷ By identifying these unconventional labours and defining them as affective, Lazzarato draws attention to mental, emotional, and domestic labours that have previously been discredited. The concept of affective labour therefore serves to demonstrate that there are other kinds of work beyond the traditional and industrial definition.

¹² Hardt, “Affective Labour” 94.

¹³ Hardt, “Affective Labour” 94.

¹⁴ Hardt, “Affective Labour” 96.

¹⁵ Hardt, and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 110.

¹⁶ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 133.

¹⁷ Lazzarato 136.

Although this thesis builds on the concept of affective labour established by Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato, it also departs from some of their key principles. For example, while Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato are primarily concerned with the beneficiaries of affective labour, this thesis takes a different approach and looks more closely at those doing affective labour. Furthermore, in the texts discussed in this thesis, I focus on how many of the characters work through the medium of affect themselves, as well as manipulating and producing desired emotional outcomes. I also discuss some revealing instances where affective labours go on in the public sphere and women receive small compensation for their work. Although Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato refer to affective labour as being unpaid, I still consider these labours to be affective, due to the degree of mental and emotional involvement.

It is important to point out that while I initially set forth to study solely housework and mental and emotional labours, in the course of looking at how work is presented, I began to trace a specialised form of affective labour to do with the arts. As my project progressed, affective labour evolved to include creative and artistic labours such as painting, singing, acting, and even writing. Therefore, a major original contribution to scholarship is the identification and development of women's affective labour of the arts. In some of the literature discussed in the following chapters, women are depicted as using affective labour to attain self-fulfilment by developing their artistic power. As it will be made clear in the course of this thesis, these affective labours may be directed towards self-fulfilment, yet there is no unified outcome; for some characters self-fulfilment is realised through marriage and motherhood, while for others, it is through work, art, and even financial and social independence.

Many studies of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writing have focused on American fiction or British fiction exclusively. My project differs in that it considers both

kinds of fiction side by side, and looks at works written by both men and women. The dates, 1848-1915, covered by this thesis are also significant in patterns of work, especially for women. Although no study could ever give a comprehensive social history, through novels we do receive special insights in to periods which aren't fully recorded elsewhere. As such, the novels explored depict various women's labours including factory work, teaching, and even labours of the arts.

In the past, extensive research has been done on women and work.¹⁸ However, the scholarship is generally historical, and most of it focuses on women's material (rather than immaterial) labour. For instance, Ivy Pinchbeck in *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* primarily focuses on the agricultural and textile industries.¹⁹ Pam Taylor discusses domestic servitude in *Women Domestic Servants 1919-1939: A Study of a Hidden Army, Illustrated By Servants' Own Recollected Experiences*, and Alice Kessler-Harris examines women's work in in the labour force in *Out to Work: A History of America's Wage-Earning Women*.²⁰ Although these are just a few examples, there is an enormous body of work on women and the labour force, and a very limited amount on women's immaterial, unpaid labour. My project contributes to this area of research by examining women's affective labours as depicted in literature.

The purpose of this study is to reconsider British and American novels through the lens of affective labour. Throughout this study I also include a succinct reception history of each novel, by surveying the changes in critical reception from the date of publication, to the

¹⁸ For studies of women and work, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labour in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work for Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Arthur McIvor, *A History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); June Purvis, *Hard Lessons: Lives and Education of Working Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jane Rendall, *Women in an Industrializing Society: England, 1750-1880* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Nicola Verdon, *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002).

¹⁹ Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London: Cass, 1969).

²⁰ Pam Taylor, *Women Domestic Servants 1919-1939: A Study of a Hidden Army, Illustrated By Servants' Own Recollected Experiences* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1976); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of America's Wage-Earning Women* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982).

present. The thesis is separated into two sections, each of which is presented chronologically. Section one (Chapters 1-5) examines British fiction, and Section two (Chapters 6-9) surveys American woman writers of antebellum and post-bellum fiction. Chapter 1 begins by examining Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848). Here, I focus on how Mary Barton's affective labours are directed towards preserving her father's secret and maintaining her lover's innocence. I also introduce the concept of artistic affective labours by discussing Margaret Jennings' quest for self-fulfilment through singing. I continue the chapter by looking at Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), and the way in which Ruth Hilton and Jemima Bradshaw are both perceived as commodities in a marriage market.

Chapter 2 introduces Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Here I use the lens of affective labour to explain the motivation behind Lady Audley's criminality, and debunk her supposed madness. Chapter 3 focuses on three of George Gissing's novels. With *The Nether World* (1889), I revisit my discussion of artistic affective labours by examining Clara Hewitt's acting, on, and off, the stage. I then explore Gissing's representation of marriage and businesswomen in *The Odd Women* (1893) and *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894).

New Woman fiction is the subject of Chapter 4. I first look at the artistic affective labours of Hadria Fullerton and Beth Caldwell in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) and Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897). I then examine Catherine Pirkis' *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (1893) which is considered as one of the first texts to portray a female detective. In all three novels the protagonists try to attain self-fulfilment and vocational success through affective labour. The final chapter on British fiction examines early twentieth-century texts. I first concentrate on the very different affective labours of Constance and Sophia Baines in Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*

(1908). I then turn my attention to the literary affective labours of Jane Holland, Nina Lempriere, and Laura Gunning in May Sinclair's *The Creators* (1910).

My discussion of American fiction (Chapter 6) begins with the antebellum novel *Ruth Hall* (1854) by Fanny Fern, and Louisa May Alcott's postbellum text, *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873). Here I discuss the literary careers of Fern and Alcott. I also examine the literary and oratorical affective labours of Fern's Ruth Hall and Alcott's Christie Devon to demonstrate the new career opportunities becoming available to women. In Chapter 7, I investigate Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' construction of the female artist in *The Story of Avis* (1877). This is also a text in which the protagonist's affective labours are unsuccessful in attaining self-fulfilment and autonomy: Avis Dobell's artistic aspirations are ultimately thwarted by marital constrictions. Although this is problematic in my examination of affective labour, I argue that it demonstrates the struggles women faced when trying to proclaim their own independence.

Similarly, Chapter 8 also examines a text that doesn't necessarily offer a reassuring narrative. The last text of nineteenth-century American fiction to be considered in the thesis is Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), in which Edna Pontellier attempts and fails to attain financial independence through affective labour. The thesis concludes by surveying three texts of early twentieth-century American fiction. In Chapter 9, the artistic affective labours of Mary Austin's Olivia Lattimore in *A Woman of Genius* (1912) and Willa Cather's Thea Kronberg in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) are discussed. The chapter also investigates the mental affective labours of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1900).

In these pages I will consider many different texts that provide valuable insights into women's lives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I hope that this study will provide a wide-ranging representation of women's lives in literature and a new outlook on their labours. I intend to revive the largely ignored texts by the "scribbling women" of Britain

and America—by reading and appreciating women writers such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mona Caird, and Mary Austin—and even discuss them alongside texts by prolific and highly acclaimed authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton. I have also included George Gissing's works, *The Netherworld*, *The Odd Women*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*, and Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, for two main reasons. Firstly, I wanted to incorporate a male perspective on the Woman Question, and secondly, because they have only recently begun to receive the kind of detailed critical attention they deserve. Furthermore, although I have chosen texts that indicate a gradual improvement as we move through time, I hope to demonstrate that the continuous struggle the characters experience shows that some of the fundamental social issues remain. I hope that this project will generate further comparative studies between British and American fiction, and motivate others to read and re-evaluate texts that are part of, and excluded from, the literary canon.

Part I. British Literature

Chapter One: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*

My examination of British literature begins with the social problem novels of the mid-nineteenth century. These works are commonly referred to as “industrial novels,” because they represent industrial society and depict the conditions of the industrial working class.

According to Lynette Felber,

The British novels of social protest reflect not only the strikes, massive unemployment, and starvation resulting from poor harvests and depressed trade, but also the social movements which sought to rectify the situation: the efforts of the Anti-Corn Law-League to abolish restrictions on foreign commerce, and the Chartists meetings of the late thirties, which saw the formulation of the “Six Points” calling for voting rights beyond those provided by the Reform Bill of 1832.¹

Novels of this genre include Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855). In this chapter I will discuss two texts by Elizabeth Gaskell that explore women's power and criticise the limitations that exist for women in this time period: *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.

Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, was published as two volumes in 1848. Due to its realistic depiction of Manchester life, the novel received positive reviews in the newspapers. For *The Examiner*, *Mary Barton* is “of unusual beauty and merit,”² and for *The Morning Post*, the realistic depiction of “humble life in Manchester”³ is

¹ Lynette Felber, “Gaskell's Industrial Idylls: Ideology and Formal Incongruence in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*,” *Clio* 18.1 (1988): 55.

² “The Literary Examiner,” *The Examiner* [London] 4 Nov. 1848: 708.

³ “Literature,” *The Morning Post* [London] 24 Nov. 1848: 6.

commendable. In *The Athenaeum* the reviewer asserts, “[the author] is excellent in the anatomy of feelings and motives, in the display of character, in the lifelike and simple use of dialogue:—and the result is, a painful interest very rare in our experience.”⁴ According to *The Morning Chronicle*, the novel is both a literary success and an admirable moral endeavor:

A work of singular pathos, earnestness, and power—a fiction teeming with salutary and most precious truths—a romance in which the homeliest and vulgarest of realities are shone upon by the light of a thoughtful philosophy, and ennobled by the kindling warmth of generous sympathies ... such is *Mary Barton*; and we as unhesitatingly congratulate the author on having achieved a signal literary success, as we respectfully recognize the elevation and generosity of her moral aim.⁵

Recent studies of Gaskell’s works continue to regard *Mary Barton* as a key work in Victorian fiction. For Ellen Moers, *Mary Barton* “is a remarkable work not only for its subject matter, but for its smoothness of execution, its relaxed and confident intermixing of the traditional young-woman-in-search-of-a-husband story of female fiction with illustrations of the particularly brutal political economy of the Hungry Forties.”⁶ According to Raymond Williams, “*Mary Barton*, particularly in its early chapters, is the most moving response in literature to the industrial suffering of the 1840s.”⁷ Similarly, Annette B. Hopkins finds it to be “the first novel to combine sincerity of purpose, convincing portrayal of character, and a largely unprejudiced picture of certain aspects of industrial life.”⁸ Due to its widespread popularity, scholars continue to offer insightful interpretations of the novel. For Macdonald

⁴ “*Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*,” *The Athenaeum* [London] 21 Oct. 1848: 1050.

⁵ “*Mary Barton*,” *The Morning Chronicle* [London] 26 Dec. 1848: 3.

⁶ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women’s Press, 1978) 20.

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) 87.

⁸ Annette B. Hopkins, “*Mary Barton*: Victorian Best Seller,” *Trollopian* 3.1 (1948): 4.

Daly, the novel is “ostensibly about the relations between labour and capital;”⁹ yet, Pearl L. Brown suggests that the novel also provides “a companion study of the difficulties nineteenth-century women faced, regardless of class, attempting to negotiate the public sphere typically reserved for men.”¹⁰ Francoise Basch examines the depiction of “female labour”¹¹ in *Mary Barton*, while Lisa Surridge discusses the “crisis in masculinity”¹² in the novel. Most of the criticism on *Mary Barton* concentrates on Gaskell’s representation of working-class life and gender relations. In my examination of the novel, I will focus on the affective labours of Mary Barton and Margaret Jennings, and demonstrate how crucial these labours are to achieving self-fulfilment.

The novel begins with a description of Green Heys Fields and the millworkers who inhabit the land:

Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls....

Their faces were not remarkable for beauty; indeed, they were below the average, with one or two exceptions; they had dark hair, neatly and classically arranged, dark eyes, but sallow complexions and irregular features. The only thing to strike a passer-by was an acuteness and intelligence of countenance, which has often been noticed in a manufacturing population.

There were also numbers of boys, or rather young men, rambling among these fields, ready to bandy jokes with any one, and particularly ready to enter

⁹ Macdonald Daly, introduction, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, by Elizabeth Gaskell (London: Penguin, 1996) viii.

¹⁰ Pearl L. Brown, “From Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* to Her *North and South*: Progress or Decline for Women?” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 345.

¹¹ Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-1867*, trans. Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen Lane, 1974) 180.

¹² Lisa Surridge, “Working-Class Masculinities in *Mary Barton*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 333.

into conversation with the girls, who, however, held themselves aloof, not in a shy, but rather in an independent way, assuming an indifferent manner to the noisy wit or obstreperous compliments of the lads.¹³

In this passage, Gaskell is making two important points. Factory work may provide girls with wages, which in turn gives them a sense of independence, yet there are also risks in working in such proximity to men. The girls are not only exposed to the “obstreperous compliments” of the boys, but they are also susceptible to being seduced by wealthy men. Although in this case the girls ignore the boys’ advances, Gaskell demonstrates that dangers exist through Esther’s story. Esther initially attracts a wealthy army officer by capitalising on her appearance and spending “her money in dress” (9). Yet, when she is unable to secure a marriage, her suitor deserts her and their baby. Having lost her virtue, Esther becomes a “fallen woman,” one who has no viable way to earn money in a society that shuns her; as a result, she resorts to alcohol and prostitution. Although I will revisit society’s regard for the fallen women in my discussion of *Ruth*, in *Mary Barton*, Esther’s demise serves as a warning.

Gaskell centres her novel on the lives of John Barton and his daughter Mary. At the outset, it is made clear that John is determined to protect Mary from repeating Esther’s mistakes. Although a second income is necessary, John refuses to let Mary work in the factories, and views domestic servitude “as a species of slavery” (26). Needlework being the only other field of work available to young women at the time, Mary begins to work for a dressmaker. In addition to labouring for money, Mary assumes all the domestic responsibilities, and even uses her own wages to take care of household needs: “of course all the money went through her hands, and the household arrangements were guided by her will and pleasure” (23). Due to domestic and financial pressures, Mary begins to aspire to live the

¹³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, ed. Macdonald Daly (London: Penguin, 1996) 6-7. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

life she thinks Esther has: one of affluence and leisure. As such, she continually searches for the opportunity to attract a wealthy suitor with her beauty:

She knew she was very pretty; the factory people ... had early let Mary into the secret of her beauty. If their remarks had fallen on an unheeding ear, there were always young men enough, in a different rank from her own, who were willing to compliment the pretty weaver's daughter as they met her in the streets.... So with this consciousness she had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady.... (26)

Mary, like Esther, wants to achieve social mobility. Rather than marry Jem Wilson, a boy in the same social class, Mary will barter her beauty and virginity, two assets valued highly in the marriage market, to attain social and financial success. Likewise, her admirer Harry Carson, is prepared to bargain for her virginity, even though he has no intention of marrying her, “feeling that at any price he must have her, only he would obtain her as cheaply as he could...” (135). Yet unlike Esther, Mary has a “keen practical shrewdness” (81) and is aware of the dangers in getting involved with someone out of wedlock. As such, Mary abstains from ever getting involved with Harry sexually, and insists that all their meetings occur in public.

It is at this point in the novel that the concept of affective labour is useful in understanding the significance of Mary’s actions. By approaching the novel in terms of affective labour, it becomes clear not only that Mary is actively pursuing marriage for financial security and social mobility, but that her mental calculations are crucial for her success. In her meetings with Harry, Mary often portrays herself in a manner that will accentuate her attributes and attract his attention: “she listened with a blush and a smile that made her look radiant with beauty” (116). Moreover, although she “encourage[s]” (123) his attentions, she avoids all sexual advances from Harry, waiting instead for his marriage proposal. Despite her plan to improve her position through marriage, and after “turning things

over in her mind again and again” (132), Mary realises that her love for Jem is stronger and more important than any transaction.

When Jem is in danger of being convicted as Harry’s murderer, Mary actively devises a scheme to free Jem, without truly knowing whether or not he is innocent of the crime. In the following passage, Gaskell demonstrates Mary’s determination to save Jem:

Before [Mary] had finished the necessary morning business of dressing, and setting her house in some kind of order, she had disentangled her ravelled ideas, and arranged some kind of a plan for action. If Jem was innocent (and now, of the guilt, even the slightest participation in, or knowledge of, the murder, she acquitted him with all her heart and soul), he must have been somewhere else when the crime was committed; probably with some others, who bear witness to the fact, if she only knew where to find them. Everything rested on her. She had heard of an alibi, and believed it might mean the deliverance she wished to accomplish.... (247)

Here, the phrase “she had disentangled her ravelled ideas, and arranged some kind of a plan for action,” suggests mental labour. Mary is using her mental faculties to find a way to prove Jem’s innocence. In the remaining pages of the novel, Mary travels to Liverpool, tracks down William Wilson (who will verify Jem’s whereabouts at the time of the murder), and testifies as a witness in court. Thus, through her affective labour, Mary is able to marry her true love, and attain self-fulfilment.

Although Mary’s affective labour is successful, it is also detrimental to her mental and physical health. Gaskell illustrates the extent of Mary’s exhaustion in the following court scenes:

For she felt the sense, the composure, the very bodily strength which she had compelled to her aid for a time, suddenly giving way, and was conscious that she was losing all command over herself. (326)

Then she checked herself, and by a great struggle brought herself round to an instant's sanity. But the round of thought never stood still; and off she went again; and every time her power of struggling against the growing delirium grew fainter and fainter. (327)

Not only is Mary having trouble commanding her body; she is unable to comprehend what is going on around her. While she gains enough sanity to give her testimony, it is only momentarily; when the judge announces his verdict, she goes mad and is “seized with convulsions” (329). For Deanna L. Davis, the “sources of Mary’s anxiety and fatigue are mainly emotional;”¹⁴ and for Craik, the combination of “physical and mental strains Mary endures before and during the trial make her subsequent breakdown entirely natural.”¹⁵ Although Davis and Craik offer valuable interpretations, I suggest that it is primarily Mary’s affective labour that is the driving force of her exhaustion.

Mary’s excessive emotional and mental labours have taxed her faculties, and in turn her body. As a result, Mary regresses to a time when she felt safe: “Her mind was in the tender state of a lately born infant’s.... She smiled gently, as a baby does when it sees its mother tending its little cot; and continued her innocent, infantine gaze into [Jem’s] face, as if the sight gave her much unconscious pleasure” (348-9). Despite temporarily losing her sanity, Mary’s health is rehabilitated. The novel ends with Mary and Jem’s marriage, and their move to Canada. Gaskell not only establishes Mary’s utmost dedication and “worship” (359) to Jem

¹⁴ Deanna L. Davis, “Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell,” *Signs* 17 (1992): 523.

¹⁵ Wendy Ann Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 537.

and her son, but portrays Mary's content with her situation. Thus, Mary's affective labour has saved both Jem and her father, and has enabled her to attain self-fulfilment through marriage.

Margaret also attains self-fulfilment through affective labour. Gaskell initially describes her as a "sallow, unhealthy, sweet-looking woman, with a careworn look" (30). Yet, it soon becomes apparent that beneath her haggard appearance lays a powerful singing voice. The reader is acquainted with Margaret's artistic power when she sings for Mary and Alice:

Margaret had both witnessed the destitution, and had the heart to feel it; and withal, her voice was of that rich and rare order, which does not require any great compass of notes to make itself appreciated.... But Margaret, with fixed eye, and earnest, dreamy look, seemed to become more and more absorbed in realising to herself the woe she had been describing, and which she felt might at that very moment be suffering and hopeless within a short distance of their comparative comfort.

Suddenly she burst forth with all the power of her magnificent voice, as if a prayer from her very heart for all who were in distress, in the grand supplication, "Lord, remember David." (37)

Margaret may be singing a simple folk song, yet, she engages her listeners with her "rich and rare" voice and continually displays passion in her performance. In fact, Margaret's emotional connection to the lyrics, and her ability to equally relay this emotion to her audience, is so strong that Mary and Alice are still with admiration: "Mary held her breath, unwilling to lose a note..." (37). By defining Margaret's singing as affective labour, we can better understand the process with which she sings, and the purpose of her singing. Margaret uses her mental and imaginative faculties to imagine the circumstances of the song, and authentically portray them through her voice. Thus, Margaret is able to express herself,

engage her audience, and attain self-fulfilment through affective labour. According to Nicky Losseff, one's voice "can act as a metaphor for authority, for self-expression, and as an instrument of empowerment, carrying meanings beyond those of speech and language."¹⁶ For Gaskell, Margaret represents the power women can have despite being constrained by Victorian ideals.

When Margaret's eyesight fails and she is no longer able to do needlework for money, she turns to music as a possible career. She begins to study under Jacob Butterworth, and even starts to earn money by singing at various lectures. Moreover, it is through her voice that she unknowingly attracts Will Wilson. When Will hears Margaret sing, he immediately views her in a different light:

So Margaret began some of her noble old-fashioned songs. She knew no modern music (for which her auditors might have been thankful), but she poured her rich voice out in some of the old canzonets she had lately learnt while accompanying the musical lecturer on his tour.

Mary was amused to see how the young sailor sat entranced; mouth, eyes, all open, in order to catch every breath of sound. His very lids refused to wink, as if afraid in that brief proverbial interval to lose a particle of the rich music that floated through the room. For the first time the idea crossed Mary's mind that it was possible the plain little sensible Margaret, so prim and demure, might have power over the heart of the handsome, dashing, spirited Will Wilson. (154)

The entrancement described here resembles a seduction. Will is so entranced with Margaret's "rich voice" and artistic power that he sits motionless through her performance. In fact, he is so smitten by Margaret that he later compares her to "an angel from heaven" (193), and

¹⁶ Nicky Losseff, "The Voice, the Breath and the Soul: Song and Poverty in *Thyrza*, *Mary Barton*, *Alton Locke* and *A Child of the Jago*," *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) 7.

announces to Mary that he plans to ask Margaret for her hand in marriage. It is important to establish that, unlike Mary, Margaret has no inclination to marry for social mobility or financial security. Margaret doesn't actively use the power of her voice to attract Will; his attraction to her is merely a by-product of her musical power and passion. For Alice Clapp, however, Margaret is a mere commodity in the marriage market and, as a result, Will views her as "the sexual woman more than the musician."¹⁷ Clapp continues by asserting, "In *Mary Barton*, Job Legh initiates gendered commodification of the singing woman: when Will visits, he thinks 'What could he do for him? He could ask Margaret to sing'" (180). Despite Clapp's assertions, Gaskell never represents Margaret as a marriageable commodity; aside from her brilliant voice, Margaret has no marketable assets: she is plain, sickly, and blind. Moreover, Gaskell maintains throughout the novel that Margaret sings for self-fulfilment, and when she goes blind, for financial support as well. By the end of the novel it is revealed that Margaret has married Will and has also regained her eyesight. While Gaskell never addresses whether or not Margaret continues to sing after her marriage, it can be assumed that she doesn't; not because she has no need to do so now that she has financial security, but most likely because she doesn't have time to, due to domestic responsibilities.

In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell gives readers great insights into the conditions of the working classes, particularly issues affecting women, including prostitution. Through Mary and Margaret, Gaskell also touches upon women's unconventional labours; by defining them as affective, we can recognise and understand them more fully. Mary's mental and emotional labours undoubtedly bring her self-fulfilment when she frees, and subsequently marries, Jem. Likewise, although Margaret suffers from blindness, she is still able to express her emotions through her voice; her mental, emotional, and imaginative labours not only fulfil her life, but unexpectedly bring her love as well. *Ruth* also displays the labours of working-class women,

¹⁷ Alice Clapp, "The City, the Country, and Communities of Singing Women: Music in the Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell," *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and its Contexts*, ed. Debra N. Mancoff and D.J. Trela (London: Garland, 1996) 121.

but this time Gaskell addresses the assumed immorality of the “fallen woman.” While considering this novel, I will examine the affective labours of Ruth Hilton and Jemima Bradshaw.

Published in 1853, *Ruth* is primarily about the fall and redemption of Ruth Hilton. In contrast with Gaskell’s other novels, at the time of its publication *Ruth* was mostly criticised for its sympathetic portrayal of a fallen woman. For example, *Sharpe’s London Magazine* writes, “We feel and appreciate the talent displayed in the construction and elaboration of the story ... but we protest against such a book being received into families, it would be the certain uprooting of the very *innocence* which is so frequently dwelt upon by the author with pleasure and delight.”¹⁸ *The Literary Gazette* takes a different approach and instead focuses on the novel’s failure:

[Ruth] has the worst fault that can attach to a work of the kind,—that of being insufferably dull. The story is meagre, improbable, and uninteresting, and the style is laboured and artificial. It would almost seem as though the English female novelists of the day were fated to write only one first-class book, and then to drop down into the ranks of mediocrity.... The present work exhibits even a worse decline ... and it makes one regret that Mrs. Gaskell should have periled her high reputation by a second essay in the same field.¹⁹

The Spectator has a similar attitude towards Gaskell and her novel, asserting that “Ruth as a whole is not proportioned to the qualities which the writer possesses.... The story ceases to be a general picture of life, and consequently fails in impressing the lesson the author would apparently teach.”²⁰ Despite its controversial subject matter, there were a few newspapers that praised Gaskell’s novel. According to *The Morning Chronicle*,

¹⁸ “Books and their Authors,” *Sharpe’s London Magazine* [London] 15 Jan. 1853: 126.

¹⁹ “Reviews,” *The Literary Gazette* [London] 22 Jan. 1853: 79.

²⁰ “Reviews,” *The Spectator* [London] 15 Jan. 1853: 61.

Ruth gives ample evidence of reflection, ability, and exquisite taste; and, although a tale in every way different from the first, few will be found to deny its interest, or refuse their admiration to its rare and varied merits—for humour, pathos, and imagination are qualities found in its pages.... *Mary Barton* is every day life dramatized—*Ruth* is more like an episode, of unusual yet not improbable occurrence, dignified into fiction.²¹

Similarly, for *The Examiner*, *Ruth* is “a work so abounding in pathos, humour and grace.” The reviewer further asserts, “We find it difficult to say how much we have been charmed and affected by this book.... No tale of guilt and shame, told without pretence or preaching, has taught more gentle truths of mercy and compassion.”²² *Manchester Times* calls *Ruth* “one of the most charming pieces of fiction this country has produced....”²³ and the review in *The Ladies’ Cabinet* concludes,

Such a novel is not for the day only. It will live we trust to move the hearts and purify the conduct of many readers in times far off. The sorrowing, long, and painful course of an erring woman’s life has been often traced before; but the tale of *Ruth* stands gloriously aloof alike from violations of our moral sense, and from seductive pictures of evil.²⁴

Today, *Ruth* is often overlooked by scholars, in favour of Gaskell’s more popular novels, such as *Cranford* and *North and South*. One explanation for this occurrence is the unfavourable ending. As Hilary M. Schor asserts, “we resent *Ruth*’s sacrifice to a Christian myth of martyrdom, in part because it seems too clearly a continuation of her earlier passivity in the face of seduction, and in part because it seems a plot in conflict with the novel we have

²¹ “*Ruth*,” *The Morning Chronicle* [London] 1 Apr. 1853: 3.

²² “The Literary Examiner,” *The Examiner* [London] 22 Jan. 1853: 3.

²³ “Books on our Table,” *Manchester Times* [Manchester] 2 Feb. 1853: 3.

²⁴ “Literature,” *The Ladies’ Cabinet* [London] 1 Mar. 1853: 162.

been reading: it does not satisfy us emotionally or generically.”²⁵ It is true that Gaskell’s efforts in rehabilitating the fallen woman are undermined by her heroine’s death; nonetheless, the novel is significant in that it challenges Victorian conventions. Despite its unpopularity, the scholars who do discuss the novel offer various interpretations. For Sara Malton, *Ruth* is built on the “two forms of fraud: the heroine’s disguise and an event that has received little critical attention, Richard Bradshaw’s forgery.”²⁶ According to Jenny Uglow, *Ruth* “is a novel about confinement and repression in which the truth is buried, particularly the truth about women’s emotional history.”²⁷ On the other hand, Yoko Hatano demonstrates “the influences of Evangelicalism on the novel, in its motif and plot.”²⁸ In fact, for Hatano and Wendy A. Craik, *Ruth*’s religious faith makes her redemption possible. Natalka Freeland takes a different approach and discusses the commodification of women, by focusing on *Ruth*’s and *Jemima*’s places in “sexual and market economies.”²⁹ Although I too will discuss Gaskell’s portrayal of *Ruth* Hilton and *Jemima* Bradshaw as commodities in the marriage market, I will primarily focus on *Ruth*’s affective labours.

Gaskell introduces *Ruth* with a description of her physical appearance: “But, looking up, [Mrs. Mason] was struck afresh with the remarkable beauty which *Ruth* possessed; such a credit to the house, with her waving outline of figure, her striking face, with dark eyebrows and dark lashes, combined with auburn hair and a fair complexion.”³⁰ Gaskell continues by depicting the childlike qualities *Ruth* possesses: “There was, perhaps, something bewitching in the union of the grace and loveliness of womanhood with the *naïveté*, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child” (28). As with *Mary Barton*, *Ruth*’s beauty and virtue are

²⁵ Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 73.

²⁶ Sara Malton, “Illicit Illustrations: Reforming Forgery in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.1 (2005): 187.

²⁷ Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories* (London: Faber, 1999) 326.

²⁸ Yoko Hatano, “Evangelicalism in *Ruth*,” *The Modern Language Review* 95 (2000): 634.

²⁹ Natalka Freeland, “*Ruth*’s Perverse Economies: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure,” *ELH* 70.1 (2003): 197.

³⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, ed. Tim Dolan (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 11. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

valuable assets in the marriage market. However, unlike Mary, Ruth never seeks to improve her station by marrying someone wealthy. Gaskell makes sure to portray Ruth as timid and naïve, so much so, that she never is aware of Bellingham's dishonourable intentions. In the end, Ruth is deserted and left with a letter containing a £50 note as compensation. Gaskell further complicates Ruth's situation with a pregnancy. Nevertheless, Gaskell refuses to depict her heroine as a fallen woman, and instead continues to demonstrate Ruth's innocence and redemption. With the help of the Bensons, Ruth reinvents herself as Mrs. Denbigh, a widow who is left to care for her only son; through this cover she becomes a respectable governess for one of the wealthiest families in town, the Bradshaws.

Ruth's affective labour may not be evident at the outset, yet it is still a useful lens in considering her actions. When Ruth is faced with the possibility of losing her son, Leonard, to Mr. Donne (previously known as Mr. Bellingham), she tries to think of a plan that will preserve her independence and protect her son:

But the tension did not give way immediately. She fastened her door, and threw open the window, cold and threatening as was the night. She tore off her gown; she put her hair back from her heated face. It seemed now as if she could not think—as if thought and emotion had been repressed so sternly that they would not come to relieve her stupified brain. Till all at once, like a flash of lightning, her life, past and present, was revealed to her in its minutest detail. (221)

Propelled by the realization that if she succumbs to Mr. Donne's wishes she will not only lose her dignity, but her son's innocence as well, Ruth struggles to find a way to obstruct Mr. Donne's advances. The term affective labour allows the reader to understand the purpose and function of Ruth's emotional and mental labours. Ruth is only able to think clearly for her next mode of action after she calms her nerves, and steadies her emotions: "After she had

recovered from the shock of consciousness and recollection, she collected her thoughts with a stern calmness” (224). Ruth addresses Donne in a very composed and powerful manner, and makes it clear that she wants nothing to do with him or his money, even when he proposes marriage. Despite the strength she has shown in their meeting, the confrontation, and her affective labour lead to her exhaustion: “She had no strength, no power of volition to move a finger. She could not think or remember. She was literally stunned” (246). In fact, her mental labour has left her so weak that she collapses as soon as the meeting is over: “‘I am so weary! I am so weary!’ she moaned aloud at last. ‘I wonder if I might stop here, and just die away’” (247). As with Mary Barton, Ruth’s mental and physical deterioration are a result of her intense affective labour: labouring how to reject Donne’s advances, maintain her reputation, and protect her son’s innocence.

Despite Ruth’s success in driving Donne away, her secret is exposed to everyone in town. After she is fired from working at the Bradshaws, she takes a position as a sick nurse to financially support herself and Leonard. Gaskell makes it clear that nursing gives Ruth the opportunity to repent for her sins, and help those who are in desperate need of care and compassion: “‘I like being about sick and helpless people; I always feel so sorry for them; and then I think I have the gift of a very delicate touch, which is such a comfort in many cases. And I should try to be very watchful and patient’” (314). Ruth’s work in the hospital is indeed affective labour, and furthermore, this employment allows Ruth to finally attain self-fulfilment. According to Hardt and Negri, labours in Health Services are affective: “women employed as paralegals and nurses, for example, not only do the affective labour of constructing relationships with patients and clients and that of managing office dynamics, but they are also caregivers for their bosses, the lawyers and doctors, who are largely male.”³¹ Ruth uses maternal and emotional faculties to nurse the sick back into health, but she also

³¹ Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2006) 111.

utilises her education and knowledge of Latin to “read the prescriptions” (314). Nevertheless, Ruth’s affective labour eventually takes a toll on her mentally and physically. In the end, after there is an outbreak of typhoid, Ruth dies while caring for Mr. Donne. Still, by rejecting Mr. Donne’s money and preferring to labour for capital, Ruth has achieved many feats: she has repaired her reputation, gained financial independence as well as autonomy, and most importantly, secured her child’s future. According to Schor, “Ruth is transformed into a kind of saint, praised on all sides, her sin entirely forgotten in the good she is doing.”³²

In *Ruth*, Gaskell explores society’s view of the fallen woman, and also demonstrates the importance of religion. Furthermore, through Ruth and Jemima, she addresses the oppressive qualities of the social system: the idea that women serve as commodities that can be bought and sold in the marriage market. According to Luce Irigaray,

The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women.... The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves....

Why exchange women? Because they are “scarce [commodities] ... essential to the life of the group,” the anthropologist tells us....

In still other words: all the systems of exchange that organise patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, values, and rewarded in these societies are men’s business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he “pays” the father or the brother, not the mother ...), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another.³³

³² Schor 72.

³³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (New York: Cornell UP, 1985) 170-1.

Similarly, in *The Subjection of Women*, Mill asserts, “Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband. Until a late period in European history, the father has the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers.”³⁴ Irigaray and Mill both explore the commodification of women in early nineteenth-century society. Gaskell is able to challenge the marriage market through Jemima and Mr. Farquhar, who marry out of love, rather than for monetary or social gain.

According to Marx’s theory of commodities and exchange, a society that functions under capitalism accumulates wealth by the production and exchange of commodities. Every commodity has use-value and exchange-value. The usefulness or “utility” of an object gives it a use-value, one that is realized only “by use or consumption;”³⁵ in a similar respect, exchange-value is a “quantitative relation ... the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort.”³⁶ Thus, an object’s exchange-value is realised only when it is compared to other commodities. Although a commodity’s value depends on both use-value and exchange-value, it can only “manifest itself or be expressed”³⁷ through its exchange-value. Simply, a commodity, no matter how useful, can only be realized when it is bought or sold through the market. For a commodity to be exchanged, it must be placed in the market by its “guardian [also known as] owner,”³⁸ who then has the ability to buy and sell commodities as he sees fit. The structure of the capitalist system of exchange is mirrored, albeit in a smaller scope, in that of the marriage market. Here, women serve as commodities bought (exchanged) by their owners, men. As Irigaray points out, in a capitalist economy, women function as mere commodities, while men function as their buyers. Since women are

³⁴ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997) 29.

³⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: An Abridged Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 13.

³⁶ Marx 14.

³⁷ Marx 15.

³⁸ Marx 51.

defined as “objects,”³⁹ they have no rights to their own bodies, and no way to choose their own buyers; thus women can only be exchanged by men, to men.

As a commodity in the marriage market, Jemima possesses both use-value and exchange-value; use-value because she has the potential to have children, and exchange-value because she is an unmarried “virginal woman.”⁴⁰ When Mr. Bradshaw observes Mr. Farquhar’s (Bradshaw’s business partner) interest in his daughter, he sets forth to make a lucrative business arrangement:

Mr. Bradshaw saw just enough of this interest which Jemima had excited in his partner’s mind, to determine him in considering their future marriage as a settled affair. The fitness of the thing had long ago struck him; her father’s partner—so the fortune he meant to give her might continue in the business; a man of such steadiness of character, and such a capital eye for a desirable speculation as Mr. Farquhar—just the right age to unite the paternal with the conjugal affection ... in short, what could be more suitable in every way? Mr. Bradshaw respected the very self-restraint he thought he saw in Mr. Farquhar’s demeanour, attributing it to a wise desire to wait until the trade should be rather more slack, and the man of business more at leisure to become the lover. (176-7)

Here, Gaskell is establishing marriage as a trade; Bradshaw plans to exploit his daughter’s use-value for a transaction, one that will secure the future of his business. Instead of considering Jemima’s happiness, Bradshaw solely looks toward the “advantages arising from the connexion” (181). According to Freeland, “Bradshaw’s desire to cash in on his daughter’s virtue makes that virtue itself appear economically motivated and therefore suspect;

³⁹ Irigaray 189.

⁴⁰ Irigaray 186.

Jemima's modesty at once establishes her value on the marriage market...."⁴¹ While exposing Bradshaw's intentions, Gaskell portrays Jemima as a strong and unruly character. Instead of tolerating and abiding by her father's terms, Jemima rebels:

[Bradshaw] "Surely you must know that I hope [Farquhar] may one day be your husband; that is to say, if you prove yourself worthy of the excellent training I have given you. I cannot suppose Mr. Farquhar would take any undisciplined girl as a wife."

Jemima held tight by a chair near which she was standing. She did not speak; her father was pleased by her silence—it was the way in which he liked his projects to be received.

"But you cannot suppose," he continued, "that Mr. Farquhar will consent to marry you—"

"Consent to marry me!" repeated Jemima, in a low tone of brooding indignation; were those the terms upon which her rich woman's heart was to be given, with a calm consent of acquiescent acceptance, but a little above resignation on the part of the receiver? (180)

Bradshaw views the future marriage as a "project." His disregard for Jemima's feelings is also evident in the way that he addresses her—he expects complete submission. Still, Gaskell displays Jemima's wilful nature by rejecting Farquhar under these terms. Instead, she and Farquhar come to their own understanding and keep their marriage a secret. In this way, Jemima avoids being considered a commodity. Her marriage to Farquhar out of love, rather than through an exchange between men, also allows her to abstain from the marriage market entirely.

⁴¹ Freeland 200.

Gaskell also addresses the commodification of women in *Mary Barton*. When Esther is seduced and found to be pregnant out of wedlock, her use-value and exchange-value in the marriage market diminish. However, when she turns to prostitution, her value in the market changes. According to Irigaray,

In [the prostitute's case], the qualities of woman's body are 'useful.' However, these qualities have 'value' only because they have already been appropriated by a man, and because they serve as the locus of relations—hidden ones—between men. Prostitution amounts to *usage that is exchanged*.... The woman's body is valuable because it has already been used. In the extreme case, the more it has served, the more it is worth. Not because its natural assets have been put to use this way, but on the contrary because its nature has been 'used up,' and has become once again no more than a vehicle for relations among men.⁴²

Essentially, the more men use the prostitute, the higher her value rises, and the more worthy she becomes (to men, not to society). Although like Esther, Ruth's use-value has been realized through her illegitimate child, her exchange-value never diminishes because she avoids prostitution and any subsequent relationships with men. According to Freeland, "by holding herself aloof from sexual circulation, Ruth is remarkably successful in her effort to restore the social credit which she lost by being overcirculated."⁴³ When Mr. Donne proposes marriage to Ruth, and "bid[s] a higher price" (244) in an effort to repossess her, Ruth's value in the marriage market alters; she now has use-value as well as exchange-value. By rejecting Donne's proposal, Ruth embodies almost the same value as a chaste, unmarried woman. This is why her redemption is possible, and why by the end of the novel, she is no longer viewed as a fallen woman.

⁴² Irigaray 186.

⁴³ Freeland 205.

In this chapter I have examined Gaskell's depiction of the social and financial circumstances of the working classes. In *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, Gaskell redefines women's roles in the capitalist economy, and alters the way one evaluates women's labours. The value in reading these texts through the lens of affective labour lies in being able to recognise women's domestic, maternal, mental, and emotional labours, which have previously been overlooked. In *Mary Barton*, Mary's mental labouring leads to Jem's freedom, and Margaret's singing is identified as an artistic labour, one that gives her self-fulfilment. Similarly, in *Ruth*, Ruth's mental and emotional labours eventually lead to her own repentance and social acceptance. Finally, by analysing these texts through this lens, Mary's and Ruth's debilitating exhaustion can be recognised as a side-effect of affective labour. Although a few more characters suffer collapse when labouring affectively—and in the following chapters when these cases do occur they will be discussed fully—it is important to point out that affective labour remains a predominantly positive concept; as a result of this labour, self-fulfilment is possible for the majority of the characters.

Chapter Two: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

In the 1860s a new genre of British fiction became widely popular. Borrowing elements from the Industrial novel, the Newgate novel, and the Gothic genre, sensation fiction encompassed realism, criminality, mania and sexuality. It is also important to note that the genre was heavily influenced by the “scandals that were raging through the Victorian age,”¹ primarily the crimes involving women such as Madeleine Smith and Adelaide Berret. This kind of novel was radical in that it was the first to depict its villain as a female character who exuded both beauty and innocence. According to Lyn Pykett,

The distinctive features of this new novelistic mode were its passionate, devious, dangerous and not infrequently deranged heroines, and its complicated, mysterious plots—involving crime, bigamy, adultery, arson, and arsenic. Perhaps most shocking of all was the fact that these ‘fast’ novels of passion and crime were all set in the context of the otherwise mundane domestic life of a contemporary middle-class or aristocratic English household, and that they were both read and written largely by women.²

In addition to eroding feminine ideals and challenging Victorian conventions, sensation fiction also disturbed Victorian domesticity and the family unit. Saverio Tomaiuolo asserts, “The family, conceived in the past as a shelter and an example of moral rectitude, was depicted by sensation novelists as infected and corrupted to its root by ‘endemic’ maladies such as economic eagerness, violence, (inherited) madness and repressed sexual drives.”³ Nevertheless, works such as Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1859), Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd* (1863) and Joseph Sheridan Le

¹ Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 5.

² Lyn Pykett, *The “Improper” Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992) 47-48.

³ Saverio Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley’s Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010) 8.

Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) were extremely popular and sold many copies. Although all of these novels are emblematic of the sensation genre, I will focus on Mary Elizabeth Braddon's best known novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Lady Audley's Secret was first published by *Robin Goodfellow* in serial form in 1861; discontinued soon after, Braddon "resumed it for continuation in the *Sixpenny Magazine* from January to December 1862."⁴ Containing crime, bigamy and mania, Elaine Showalter summarises the novel as follows: "Braddon's bigamous heroine deserts her child, pushes husband number one down a well, thinks about poisoning husband number two, and sets fire to a hotel in which her other male acquaintances are residing."⁵ At the time of its publication the novel and Braddon were subject to criticism; for example, according to *The Literary Examiner*, Braddon's novels are "literature of the kitchen."⁶ However, the majority of British newspapers gave the text positive reviews. For the *Morning Post*, the novel is "the latest example of detective literature, and is a remarkable book;"⁷ *The Reader* offers a similar review asserting that the novel is a "genuine literary success," and quite "clever."⁸ *The Times* calls it "a good galloping novel, like a good gallop, to be enjoyed rather than criticised,"⁹ and *The Athenaeum* describes the novel as being, "the sort of book to be read by everybody—not too sentimental for a man's requirements, nor too useful for a woman's; having no end of plots and conspiracies for those who like plots, and plenty of light, easy, agreeable conversation for those who do not."¹⁰ *The North British Review* even went so far as to identify Braddon as "a woman of genius."¹¹

⁴ David Skilton, note on the text, *Lady Audley's Secret*, by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) xxiv.

⁵ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977) 134.

⁶ "The Literary Examiner," *The Examiner* [London] 14 Mar. 1863: 6.

⁷ "*Lady Audley's Secret*," *The Morning Post* [London] 17 Oct. 1862: 6.

⁸ "*Aurora Floyd* and *Lady Audley's Secret*," *The Reader* [London] 28 Feb. 1863: 210-211.

⁹ "*Lady Audley's Secret*," *The Times* [London] 18 Nov. 1862: 4.

¹⁰ "*Lady Audley's Secret*," *The Athenaeum* [London] 25 Oct. 1862: 525.

¹¹ "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon," *The North British Review* [London] Sept. 1865: 180.

Scholars today continue to praise the novel and its themes, offering many different interpretations of the text. For Lynn M. Voskuil, Lady Audley is an “unnatural monster—a childish, blonde creature who looked the part of the Victorian wife but who then belied that appearance by acting out a brazen materialism and murderous self-assertion;”¹² Voskuil continues by comparing Lady Audley to an actress and suggesting that her actions are both criminal and “inauthentic.”¹³ Eva Bodowska supports this idea of falseness: “we could say that Lady Audley is also a Veneering, her aristocratic status acquired by marriage, in addition to several changes of name and the ‘soft wrappings of satin and fur’ with which she packages herself.”¹⁴ Conversely, Patricia Gilbert views Lady Audley’s actions as those of “a hero, not a villain,”¹⁵ because her motivations lie in trying to support her child and retain her social status and wealth. Jill Matus takes a similar approach and asserts that Lady Audley’s character is dangerous because “she threatens to violate class boundaries and exclusions, and to get away with appropriating social power beyond her entitlement.”¹⁶ While scholars have focused on many aspects of Lady Audley’s criminality as well as mania, they have failed to come to a consensus about Lady Audley’s mental stability, offering many contradicting viewpoints. By analysing the novel through the lens of affective labour, and viewing Lady Audley’s actions as labours directed towards preserving her social status and wealth, some of these debates are resolved. As such, when considering the question of Lady Audley’s supposed mania, I suggest that she is neither insane, nor a criminal, but rather a woman who is punished for transcending the boundaries Victorian society has placed upon her sex.

¹² Lynn M. Voskuil, “Acts of Madness: Lady Audley and the Meanings of Victorian Femininity,” *Feminist Studies* 27 (2001): 615.

¹³ Voskuil 616.

¹⁴ Eva Bodowska, “On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37 (2009): 161.

¹⁵ Patricia Gilbert, “Madness and Civilization: Generic Opposition in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” *Essays in Literature* 23.2 (1996): 227.

¹⁶ Jill L. Matus, “Disclosure as ‘Cover-up’: The Discourse of Madness in *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62.3 (1993): 335.

Braddon first introduces Helen Talboys/Lucy Graham/Lady Audley through a detailed account of her appearance:

The innocence and candor of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness. She owned to twenty years of age, but it was hard to believe her more than seventeen. Her fragile figure, which she loved to dress in heavy velvets, and stiff, rustling silks, till she looked like a child tricked out for a masquerade, was as girlish as if she had just left the nursery.¹⁷

Here Lady Audley is portrayed as beautiful and feminine. Braddon even goes so far as to compare her appearance to that of an angel: "They were the most wonderful curls in the world – soft and feathery, always floating away from her face, and making a pale halo round her head when the sunlight shone through them" (8). In these passages Braddon equates Lady Audley to the image of Coventry Patmore's angel in the house.¹⁸ Lady Audley's angelic and childlike features, in addition to the innocence that is conveyed in the descriptions, further demonstrate her resemblance to the feminine ideal.

Throughout the text Braddon consistently depicts Lady Audley as a commodity, one similar to the expensive objects she has in her chambers:

Drinking-cups of gold and ivory, chiseled by Benvenuto Cellini; cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Marie-Antoinette, amid devices of rosebuds and true-lovers' knots, birds and butterflies, cupids and shepherdesses, goddesses, courtiers, cottagers, and milkmaids; statuettes of Parian marble and biscuit china; gilded baskets of hothouse flowers;

¹⁷ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. David Skilton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 52. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸ See Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: Macmillan, 1863).

fantastical caskets of Indian filigree-work; fragile tea-cups of turquoise china, adorned by medallion miniatures of Louis the Great and Louis the Well-beloved, Louise de la Valliere, Athenais de Montespan, and Marie Jeanne Gomar de Vaubernier: cabinet pictures and gilded mirrors, shimmering satin and diaphanous lace; all that gold can buy or art devise had been gathered together for the beautification of this quiet chamber.... (295)

Her possessions clearly imply a certain kind of femininity, aristocracy, and sophistication. Amongst the gold, statues, jewellery, and other expensive trinkets, Lady Audley herself can also be mistaken as a beautiful, expensive, doll. In fact, Katherine Montwieler goes so far as to describe her as an “active decorative object, a mechanical doll who knows how to act appropriately.”¹⁹ While Lady Audley certainly appears to be a helpless, powerless commodity, I suggest that there is more to her than just an appearance; Braddon purposely moulds Lady Audley to the feminine ideal and likens her to a beautiful decoration to conceal her masculine agency. Lady Audley will eventually demonstrate her power by using her feminine charms to manipulate others and employing her affective labour to attain what she wants: financial and social security, no matter the cost.

In addition to the radical themes of the novel, Braddon also makes a point of satirising several Victorian issues; one of these is social mobility acquired through marriage. As with Gaskell’s Mary Barton, Lady Audley is aware that her beauty is a valuable asset in the marriage market, and uses it to obtain financial security and social mobility:

“As I grew older I was told that I was pretty – beautiful – lovely – bewitching. I heard all these things at first indifferently, but by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that ... I might be more successful in the world's great lottery than my companions. I had learnt that which in some indefinite

¹⁹ Katherine Montwieler, “Marketing Sensation: *Lady Audley’s Secret* and Consumer Culture” *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert et al (Albany: State University of New York, 2000) 51.

manner or other every school-girl learns sooner or later – I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any one of them.” (350)

Determined to be sold to the “highest bidder” (18), Lady Audley marries George Talboys; when he deserts her and leaves her penniless, she once again searches for a wealthy suitor to attract and marry. Braddon demonstrates Lady Audley’s dishonest intentions towards the end of the novel: “I think I loved [Talboys] as much as it was in my power to love anybody; not more than I have loved you, Sir Michael ... for when you married me you elevated me to a position that he could never have given me” (351).

When Lady Audley’s secret of bigamy is threatened to be revealed, she is initially portrayed as lacking the strength and intelligence to devise a plan: “‘I can’t plot horrible things,’” she muttered, presently; “‘my brain isn’t strong enough, or I’m not wicked enough, or brave enough’” (298). And yet, after much deliberation, Lady Audley develops a scheme that will potentially eliminate the threat Robert represents. Lady Audley’s mental calculations are evident in the following passages:

“Let me think,” she cried, silencing Phoebe’s consolatory murmurs with an imperious gesture. ‘Hold your tongue, girl, and let me think of this business, if I can.’ She put her hands to her forehead, clasping her slender fingers across her brow, as if she would have controlled the action of her brain by their convulsive pressure. (303)

She paced up and down the dressing-room in the silvery lamplight, pondering upon the strange letter which she had received from Robert Audley. She walked backward and forward in that monotonous wandering for some

time before she was able to steady her thoughts—before she was able to bring the scattered forces of her narrow intellect to bear upon the one all-important subject of the threat contained in the barrister's letter. (310)

Lady Audley is desperate to protect her secret from being exposed. She uses her mental, creative, and imaginative faculties to “steady her thoughts,” “ponder” her next move, and conceive of a way to secure her position. Although Braddon refers to her intellect as “narrow,” Lady Audley’s strategizing certainly requires intelligence and wit. Again, Braddon is satirizing and addressing the Victorian ideal of the proper feminine. In *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), John Ruskin asserts that woman’s “intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.”²⁰ Although Lady Audley appears to be Ruskin’s model woman, she is able to “invent” and “create” an elaborate plan to save herself. It is important to note that in these scenes Lady Audley’s hesitation in doing something criminal is apparent. She does not believe herself to be capable of such evil, but rather, she commits these crimes only when she is faced with the possibility of losing her status and financial security. Her decision to murder both Robert and Luke, Robert for getting too close to her secret and Luke to silence him from ever presenting proof of her past life, is clearly for self-preservation. Upon learning that both are at the Castle Inn, she attempts to kill them by burning the place down and have it appear as an accident.

When Lady Audley’s plans to kill Talboys, Robert, and Luke fail, she takes a different approach to maintain her secret. Using her feminine charms, and Sir Audley’s love to her advantage, she tries to manipulate him and make him believe that Robert is insane:

“Upon my word,” exclaimed the baronet, “I think that boy is half mad.”

My lady’s face was so much in shadow, that Sir Michael Audley was unaware of the bright change that came over its sickly pallor as he made this

²⁰ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002) 77.

very common-place observation. A triumphant smile illuminated Lucy Audley's countenance, a smile that plainly said, "It is coming—it is coming; I can twist him which way I like. I can put black before him, and if I say it is white, he will believe me." (281-2)

Although it appears that Lady Audley's tactics have worked, Robert soon reveals her past and all her efforts are worthless.

Until this point Lady Audley has attempted to murder three people, and has manipulated everyone around her in an effort to preserve her secret. Yet, rather than portraying Lady Audley as a criminal, Braddon demonstrates her hopelessness:

Lady Audley started up from her chair—started up as if she would have done something desperate in her despairing fury; but she sank back again with a weary, querulous sigh. What warfare could such a feeble creature wage against her fate? What could she do but wind like a hunted hare till she found her way back to the starting-point of the cruel chase, to be there trampled down by her pursuers? (301)

Through the lexis in this passage, "desperate," "despairing," "weary," "feeble creature," and "hunted hare," Braddon is trying to elicit the reader's sympathy. Braddon wants the reader to understand and experience Lady Audley's suffering in order to view her "pursuers," namely Robert Audley, Sir Audley and George Talboys, as the cruel aggressors. Without a doubt Braddon's heroine has attempted murder, lied, and committed bigamy. Moreover, the fact that she does so under the façade of an ideal angelic Victorian woman, more than emphasizes the scandalous nature of the affair. And yet, by the end of the novel, the reader will be strongly compelled to sympathize with Lady Audley's helplessness and desperate situation.

Throughout the novel Lady Audley's affective labour has been directed towards preserving her financial and social security. Although her plots and schemes have failed thus

far, she uses her mental, creative, and emotional faculties one last time; in an attempt to avoid the “criminal dock” (394), she decides to present herself as suffering from latent mania.

Rather than have her heroine convicted of crime, Braddon uses insanity to justify her actions and alleviate the situation. According to Showalter,

Lady Audley’s unfeminine assertiveness ... must ultimately be described as madness, not only to spare Braddon the unpleasant necessity of having to execute an attractive heroine ... but also to spare the woman reader the guilt of identifying with a cold-blooded killer.... As every woman reader must have sensed, Lady Audley’s real secret is that she is sane and, moreover, representative.²¹

Indeed, it seems that Lady Audley’s actions carry no mania, but rather powerful, masculine, “unfeminine” features. Braddon’s proof that Lady Audley is, in fact, sane lies in Dr.

Mosgrave’s evaluation:

“... there is no evidence of madness in anything she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that.... I should be glad to help you, if I could, Mr. Audley, but I do not think there is any proof of insanity in the story you have told me. I do not think any jury in England would accept the plea of insanity in such a case

²¹ Showalter, *A Literature of their Own* 167.

as this. The best thing you can do with this lady is to send her back to her first husband; if he will have her.” (377)

“The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!” (379)

Dr. Mosgrave is unable to deem Lady Audley insane, because there is logic and reason behind all of her actions. The repetition of “there is no madness there,” further demonstrates her sanity and rational state of mind; everything she has done has been directed towards self-preservation. Having already established she doesn’t suffer from madness, he resorts to defining her as a threat and “dangerous.” According to Lynn Pykett, “Lady Audley is dangerous because she is not what she appears to be, because she cannot be contained within the bounds of the proper feminine.”²² Anthony S. Wohl has a similar assertion: Lady Audley is “devious and perfidious not because she is a criminal and mad, but because she is a lady and sane.”²³ Despite proving her sanity, Dr. Mosgrave and Sir Audley are incapable of explaining Lady Audley’s criminality without questioning her femininity. She is eventually deemed insane and sent to an asylum as a way to contain her agency.

In the nineteenth century, mania became all too relevant in Victorian psychiatry. Scholarship today continues to offer many valuable insights into the Victorians’ attitude towards madness. According to Matus, “the term ‘moral insanity’ referred to madness as the experience of inappropriate emotions rather than the result of defective reasoning and cognitive impairment.”²⁴ Although men were also susceptible to mania, women were believed to be especially prone due to their genetics. As Showalter asserts, “theories of female insanity were specifically and confidently linked to the biological crises of the female

²² Pykett 95.

²³ Anthony S. Wohl, *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) 113.

²⁴ Matus 338.

life-cycle—puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause—during which the mind would be weakened and the symptoms of insanity might emerge.”²⁵ Overall, Victorians based women’s madness on biological factors, rather than considering imposed social and behavioural restrictions. Phyllis Chesler expounds on this idea and stresses that societal constraints caused women to be “deeply unhappy, self-destructive, economically powerless and sexually impotent.”²⁶ Women were perceived as mad not due to their mental instability, but either because they were depressed with their social limitations, or because they dared to violate the feminine ideal and express their innermost thoughts and feelings

In order to rectify their masculine propensities, women were sent to asylums that were modelled after the home, the private sphere. According to Showalter, “the ladylike values of silence, decorum, taste, service, piety and gratitude ... were made an integral part of the program of moral management of women in Victorian asylums.”²⁷ Furthermore,

Women’s work within the asylum was also more rigidly circumscribed than that of men. Women’s occupations were intended to reinforce conventional sex-role behaviour.... While male patients worked at a variety of jobs in workshops and on the asylum farms, women patients had little choice in their employment, which took place indoors and in some cases was meaningless fancywork or make-work, such as sorting colored beans into separate piles that were dumped together at night.... A more prosaic view of feminine nature was suggested by the primary tasks of women in the asylum: cleaning, laundry, and sewing.²⁸

²⁵ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987) 55.

²⁶ Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (London: Allen Lane, 1974) 25.

²⁷ Showalter 79.

²⁸ Showalter, *The Female Malady* 82.

Since madness in women was seen as “acting-out of the devalued female role, or the total or partial rejection of one’s sex-role stereotype,”²⁹ it is only fitting that asylums served to cure women of their deviance. Thus, the question remains whether women were deemed insane because they really were, or whether it was largely an effort to oppress them, and stop them from infecting others with their rebellion. Again, I suggest that Braddon is satirizing Victorian culture, specifically psychiatry. By offering a full account of the difficulties Lady Audley faces, and the measures she takes to attain a better life, Braddon is asserting that Lady Audley isn’t plagued by madness, but rather desperation. When reading this work through the lens of affective labour, it becomes clear that Lady Audley’s sanity is indisputable. Lady Audley’s mental and emotional labours are purposeful, calculated, and directed towards preserving her social and financial status. Her demise, then, is not due to her affective labour, but due to the patriarchal society she is embedded in; locking her in an asylum is the only way to contain Lady Audley’s unfeminine actions, and in essence oppress her character. By reading this work in terms of affective labour, we can better understand Braddon’s attitude towards femininity, madness, and oppression, and better appreciate the challenges faced by women seeking economic security.

²⁹ Chesler 53.

Chapter Three: George Gissing's *The Nether World*, *The Odd Women* and *In the Year of Jubilee*

When considering late nineteenth-century British literature it is important to acknowledge George Gissing for his portrayal of the lower classes and to note how his novels “stand in the direct line of succession from the ‘industrial novels’ of the 1840s.”¹ Although Gissing wrote over twenty novels in his literary career, his “major phase,” of writing, according to Simon J. James, began with his 1890 novel *The Emancipated*.² In this chapter I will discuss the labours of women as portrayed in Gissing’s earlier novel, *The Nether World* (1889), and his two later novels, *The Odd Women* (1893) and *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894).

The Nether World was first published in 1889 in three instalments, and was then reissued as one complete volume in 1890.³ As with Gissing’s previous novels, such as *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *Demos* (1886), and *Thyrza* (1887), *The Nether World* focuses on the conditions of the working classes. At the time of its publication, the novel was subject to extensive criticism. According to *The Pall Mall Gazette*,

In *Thyrza*, and *Demos*, and *The Nether World*, [Gissing] stamps with cynical failure every effort made by the upper world for the relief of that immeasurably larger one which lies crushed beneath it. Does he expect to stimulate the upper world into fresh effort by showing them the utter futility of their regenerating visions? Or is he jealous of their joys, and desirous of reducing all mankind to one dead level of misery?⁴

The Graphic offers a similar review:

[*The Nether World*] deals, we need scarcely say, with the life of the very poor: and its being so well-written, and with such thoughtfulness, knowledge, and

¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958) 174.

² Simon J. James, *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing* (London: Anthem, 2003) 92.

³ Stephen Gill, note on the text, *The Nether World*, by George Gissing (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) xxiv.

⁴ M. D. “*The Nether World*,” *Pall Mall Gazette* [London] 4 June 1889: 3.

conviction, intensifies the gloom of the inevitable deduction that there is no use in effort either for ourselves or for others, and that misery is very much a matter of fatalism.... The story, apart from its local colour, is neither interesting nor probable; and, on the whole, *The Nether World* can hardly be recommended to readers in search of either profit or pleasure, despite its graphic power.⁵

Although the *Daily News* calls the novel “a work of art,” it also states that it “lacks humour, lightness of touch, all the play of contrast which enhances pathos and gives grace to sordid surroundings.”⁶ Despite these harsh reviews, the novel was well received by other newspapers. For example, *The Standard* claims, “While [Gissing] runs Zola close as a realist, his thoughts and language are as pure as those of Miss Yonge herself,”⁷ and *The Morning Post* asserts:

In *The Nether World* Mr. Gissing continues his powerfully realistic pictures of life among those with whom toil is a bitter reality, unrelieved by the periods of relaxation which heighten the existence of the less necessitous classes. Few writers can render with such fidelity as Mr. Gissing the heavy and tainted atmosphere which, in large cities, at least reigns in the abodes of extreme poverty.⁸

Today, Gissing’s works continue to be appreciated. In the introduction to *The Nether World*, Stephen Gill writes,

If Gissing refuses to explore the economic and social interdependence of the upper world and the lower, he presents the economic realities of the latter relentlessly. Other novels, *Little Dorrit* or *The Way We Live Now*, for example,

⁵ “New Novels,” *The Graphic* [London] 15 Jun. 1889: 667.

⁶ “Novels,” *Daily News* [London] 22 Oct. 1889: 3.

⁷ “Some Recent Novels,” *The Standard* [London] 17 Jun. 1889: 2.

⁸ “Recent Novels,” *The Morning Post* [London] 27 May 1889: 5.

deploy the idea of money more variously and imaginatively, but none conveys the reality more starkly than *The Nether World*.⁹

Richard Pearson also comments on the realism of the novel: “Gissing creates a portrait of urban primitivism shocking in its brutality.... This brutality is, however, further complicated by the recognition that its presence is sustained by the “upper world” and provides a mirror in which civilisation can gaze.”¹⁰ Lastly, according to Emma Liggins, “Gissing attempts a broader panorama of women’s work contrasting the attitudes of factory girls with those women entering the public sphere at a slightly higher level through acting and bar work.”¹¹ Although these scholars offer invaluable analyses of the text, my examination of *The Nether World* will focus on the extent to which Clara Hewett’s affective labour is directed towards achieving financial security.

Gissing first introduces Clara with a detailed account of her physical appearance so as to establish her beauty and intelligence:

She was not above the middle stature of women, but her slimness and erectness, and the kind of costume she wore, made her seem tall as she stood in this low-ceiled room. Her features were of very uncommon type, at once sensually attractive and bearing the stamp of intellectual vigour...The eyes themselves were hazel-coloured, and, whatever her mood, preserved a singular pathos of expression, a look as of self-pity, of unconscious appeal against some injustice. In contrast with this her lips were defiant, insolent, unscrupulous; a shadow of the naivete of childhood still lingered upon them, but, though you divined the earlier pout of the spoilt girl, you felt that it must have foretold this danger-signal in the mature woman. Such cast of

⁹ Stephen Gill, introduction, *The Nether World*, by George Gissing (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) xiv.

¹⁰ Richard Pearson, “George Gissing and the Ethnographer’s ‘I’: Civilisation in *The Nether World* and *Eve’s Ransom*,” *Critical Survey* 16.1 (2004): 40.

¹¹ Emma Liggins, *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006) 37.

countenance could belong only to one who intensified in her personality an inheritance of revolt; who, combining the temper of an ambitious woman with the forces of a man's brain, had early learnt that the world was not her friend nor the world's law.¹²

In this passage Gissing equates Clara's body to personality traits: her eyes display her sadness, and her lips, her bold and rebellious spirit. Although Clara isn't defined as conventionally beautiful, she uses her clothes and various accessories to enhance her assets: "the kind of costume she wore, made her seem tall," and "her hair was elaborately dressed" (TNW 26). Whereas Gaskell and Braddon describe their protagonists according to their beauty, Gissing focuses more on the intelligence and ambition Clara possesses. This suggests that Clara's cleverness will be responsible for her success.

From the outset Clara is determined to escape the drudgery of her class by any means possible: through marriage or career. Having had a good upbringing and education, she first wants to become a teacher but only so that she can meet people "who would aid her to better things" (80); her chief desire is actually to become a famous actress and have her "portrait be seen some day in the windows" (82). It is here that Gissing's attitude towards women who work in the public sphere is evident. When Clara initially accepts the position at Mrs. Tubb's establishment, Sidney Kirkwood spitefully remarks: "I hope you'll enjoy the pleasant, ladylike work you've found! I should think it'll improve your self-respect to wait on the gentlemen of Upper Street!" (32); the tone of Sidney's statement suggests that Gissing found bar work an unsuitable career for women in that it endangered their respectability and virtue. While struggling to perform the challenging manual labour required, Clara's resolve to move forward strengthens: "the character of her suffering was altered; it became less womanly, it defied weakness and grew to a fever of fierce, unscrupulous rebellion" (86); again Gissing is

¹² George Gissing, *The Nether World*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 25-26. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as TNW.

demonstrating the threat this position poses for Clara's femininity. He revisits the dangers that exist for women who labour in the public sphere when Clara begins her acting career.

Clara eventually becomes part of a travelling company, but only playing a small and inconsequential part. According to Tracy C. Davis, in Victorian England "the public believed in actresses' immorality and worthlessness."¹³ Gissing expresses a similar kind of belief through his representation of Clara's acting career. Determined to earn more money and achieve fame, Clara admits she will do anything to be cast in a more significant role: "for a large sum of money there are few things I wouldn't do" (200); Gissing continues by establishing that "she had sold herself to degradation with this one hope" (207). Through these quotations Gissing is suggesting that as an actress, Clara is dangerously close to resembling a prostitute. As Davis asserts, acting and prostitution were considered to be "erroneous 'professions;'" she continues by pointing out that "no other occupations could be so financially rewarding for single, independent Victorian women of outgoing character, fine build, and attractive features."¹⁴ Nevertheless, despite the promising financial earnings of the stage, it was often difficult to secure an engagement without having "good looks ... training in speech, dance, [and] music."¹⁵

When Clara is finally offered a lead role in an upcoming play, her prospects in transcending social boundaries look promising. She prepares by spending hours rehearsing: "there was fire and tumult in her brain.... Already she had begun to rehearse the chief scenes of *Laura Denton*; she spoke the words with all appropriate loudness and emphasis; her gestures were those of the stage, as though an audience sat before her; she seemed to have grown taller" (206). It is clear that Clara is utilising various skills and techniques to emulate her role. By using affective labour to denote Clara's mental, emotional, and creative labours,

¹³ Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 77.

¹⁴ Davis 84.

¹⁵ Davis 76.

her efforts can be recognised and understood. Despite Clara's preparation, she never has the chance to display her talents; on the night of her debut, a jealous actress throws acid on her face and disfigures it completely. Devastated by the loss of her beauty and stage career, Clara has no choice but to return home. According to Emma Liggins, Clara's "facial disfigurement ensures a restriction on the mobility Sidney fears, and allows her to be safely repositioned in the home."¹⁶ For Gissing, bar work and acting threaten women's femininity and virtue. Therefore, by abruptly ending Clara's acting career, Gissing ensures her place in the private sphere.

Due to her appearance and the lack of job opportunities, Clara knows the only way to attain financial security is through marriage. Having no other prospects, she decides to take advantage of the love Sidney Kirkwood once had for her, and manipulate him into marriage. Because she is no longer beautiful, she has to find ways to compensate for her disfigurement:

... she seated herself before the looking-glass ... and dressing her hair with quite unusual attention. This beauty at least remained to her; arranged as she had learned to do it for the stage, the dark abundance of her tresses crowned nobly the head which once shed itself with such defiant grace ... she arranged the veil upon her head so that she could throw her hat aside without disturbing it.... (282)

Clara carefully arranges her hair, and places her veil in a calculated position so that it can conceal her ugliness. For Clara to be successful, she has to first win Sidney's sympathy. Again, Clara's affective labour is evident as she tries to embody the role of a helpless and distressed woman: "An actress improvising her part, she regulated every tone with perfect skill, with inspiration; the very attitude in which she seated herself was a triumph of the artist's felicity" (284). She continues her performance with a "faltering voice" in order to

¹⁶ Emma Liggins, "Her Appearance in Public: Sexual Danger, Urban Space and the Working Woman," *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed*, ed. Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 33.

display her “mental anguish” and utter helplessness (284). Her performance is one of the best in her career, “no piece of acting was ever more delicately finished” (287), and by the end of the novel she has achieved her goal; she marries Sidney and in turn attains financial security.

In *The Nether World* Gissing addresses the dismal circumstances surrounding the working classes, and the extreme steps they take to ensure their survival. While Gissing’s attitude towards Clara’s character may not be entirely sympathetic, he is more critical of society that has, in effect, pushed Clara to act selfishly and cunningly to achieve her goals. Gissing furthers his critique of society in *The Odd Women*, where he focuses on the middle classes and explores the limited opportunities that exist for well-educated, unmarried women.

The Odd Women was published in 1893, in the midst of the New Woman movement. At the time of its publication only a few professions, aside from teaching and marriage, were available to women of the middle classes.¹⁷ As a result, women turned to education in the hopes that it would eventually provide more job opportunities. Although higher education was primarily for men, by the end of the nineteenth century it also became available to women in an attempt to “protect them from the indignity of unendowed spinsterhood.”¹⁸ Moreover, many agencies were created in an attempt to train women for future employment. For example, in 1859 the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW) was founded and aimed to “promot[e] the Training of Women and their employment in industrial pursuits.”¹⁹ Women would be trained in various skills and then be sent off to job interviews, landing jobs more easily than before; companies where women were the sole employees, like the Victoria Press, were also created as a way to promote women in the labour market. With the opportunity of better education and training, these women quickly became “self-

¹⁷ For further reading see Chapter 2 in Emma Liggins, *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999) 152.

¹⁹ Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) 87.

supporting, politically assertive and highly articulate.”²⁰ Nevertheless, despite these advancements, Victorian society criticised the aspirations of these women and even defined them as odd, spinsters, and even “unsexed.”²¹

Although Gissing satirised the “romantic accounts of the New Woman,”²² *The Odd Women* was generally well received. For example, *The Woman’s Herald* praises *The Odd Women*:

No novel perhaps ... has treated more exhaustively and more adequately the whole position of women; no previous writer has brought to his task so complete a knowledge of the subject.... In many ways the book is a very daring one; it touches many of the issues of life that almost all his contemporaries have passed over in silence, and it presents many moral questions in a new light, which can hardly fail in compelling thought even in the most unsympathetic.²³

The Leeds Mercury also includes a highly positive review:

Mr Gissing’s views of marriage are not ours, but he has given us in *The Odd Women* a novel of considerable merit.... Love and jealousy duly play their part in this powerful but sombre book, which in sheer strength of delineation and moral insight touches a level but seldom reached by the three-volume novel at the circulating libraries.²⁴

For the *Glasgow Herald* the novel is a “genuine work of art;”²⁵ *The Morning Post* is also sympathetic towards the text: “Mr. George Gissing’s novels have always a purpose, well-

²⁰ Deirdre David, “Ideologies of Patriarchy, Feminism, and Fiction in *The Odd Women*,” *Feminist Studies* 10 (1984): 121.

²¹ Patricia Cominiti, “A Feminist Fantasy: Conflicting Ideologies in *The Odd Women*,” *Studies in the Novel* 27 (1995): 540.

²² Patricia Ingham, introduction, *The Odd Women*, 1893, by George Gissing (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) vii.

²³ “A Study in Average Women,” *The Woman’s Herald* [London] 22 Jun. 1893: 281-2.

²⁴ “Literary Arrivals,” *The Leeds Mercury* [Leeds] 22 May 1893: 8.

²⁵ “New Books,” *Glasgow Herald* [Glasgow] 20 Apr. 1893: 9.

defined, and carried out with characteristic vigour ... *The Odd Women* is not as brilliant as some of its predecessors, but is, nevertheless, a powerfully-written story.”²⁶

Critics today offer many different interpretations of the novel’s themes. According to Patricia Ingham, *The Odd Women* “engages with all the major social and sexual issues that were fiercely debated as the nineteenth century approached its close,”²⁷ and Susan Colon suggests that “the novel interrogates in new ways the interrelationship of the professional and the domestic in women’s lives.”²⁸ For Wendy Lesser the novel is “one of the best portrayals of the women’s movement, old or new,”²⁹ and yet Deirdre David asserts that *The Odd Women* has an “uncertain resolution.”³⁰ Patricia Comitini also comments on the novel’s dissatisfying ending:

... while it represents two major historical problems that middle-class unmarried women faced in the late nineteenth century—their ‘redundancy’ and their need to secure economic means of survival—the possible solutions to these problems that the novel presents are negated by the manner of their presentation.... *The Odd Women*, therefore, does not produce solutions to these historical problems, but rather distantiates, critiques, and puts into dialogue the feminist ideologies present in Victorian society.³¹

Lastly, Simon J. James concludes that “Gissing comprehensively fails to provide any generic utopian or romantic contingencies that might alleviate the plight of his heroines, especially in respect of their possession of money.”³² Although all of these scholars offer insightful analyses of the novel, I will focus on Monica Madden’s affective labour and the way it is

²⁶ “Recent Novels,” *The Morning Post* [London] 12 Jun. 1893: 2.

²⁷ Ingham ix.

²⁸ Susan Colon, “Professionalism and Domesticity in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*,” *English Literature in Translation* 44.4 (2001): 441.

²⁹ Wendy Lesser, “Even-handed Oddness: George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*,” *The Hudson Review* 37.2 (1984): 210.

³⁰ David 118.

³¹ Comitini 529-30.

³² James 124.

directed towards achieving financial and social mobility through marriage. I will also examine Mary Barfoot's efforts in trying to provide the means for middle-class women to achieve independence and autonomy.

As with Clara in *The Nether World*, Monica is first introduced with a detailed physical description:

Monica's face was of a recognized type of prettiness; a pure oval; from the smooth forehead to the dimpled little chin all its lines were soft and graceful. Her lack of colour, by heightening the effect of black eyebrows and darkly lustrous eyes, gave her at present a more spiritual cast than her character justified; but a thoughtful firmness was native to her lips, and no possibility of smirk or simper lurked in the attractive features. The slim figure was well fitted in a costume of pale blue, cheap but becoming; a modest little hat rested on her black hair; her gloves and her sunshade completed the dainty picture.³³

Through the words "prettiness," "soft," "graceful," and "dainty," Gissing is establishing Monica's beauty and femininity; in addition, by juxtaposing her pale skin to her dark characteristics, Gissing further illustrates her striking appearance. Although Clara's cleverness complemented her physical attractiveness in her acquisition of financial security, it is evident that Monica's beauty will be an important factor in her success

At first, Monica works at a draper's shop to support herself. Soon after, with the insistence of her sisters, Virginia and Alice, she enrolls in Mary Barfoot's school, in an effort to train for clerical positions. Despite the promising opportunities the school has to offer, Monica doesn't intend to labour as a secretary. Instead, she is determined to use her beauty to improve her social and financial position through marriage.

³³ George Gissing, *The Odd Women*, 1893, ed. Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 32. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as TOW.

Monica's opportunity in marrying for convenience is realised when she meets Edmund Widdowson, "an oldish man, with grizzled whiskers and a rather stern visage" (TOW 38). Monica assesses Widdowson's wealth by questioning him about his occupation, and observing his clothes: "He had gold links in his white shirt-cuffs, and a gold watch-guard chosen with a gentleman's taste" (48). Satisfied with his apparent "large fortune" (128), Monica puts more effort into her meetings with Widdowson, even attaining his sympathy by describing her miserable working conditions and equally bleak past life. Eventually the prospect of marriage seems promising:

As things went in the marriage war, she might esteem herself a most fortunate young woman. It seemed that he had really fallen in love with her; he might prove a devoted husband. She felt no love in return; but between the prospect of a marriage of esteem and that of no marriage at all there was little room for hesitation. The chances were that she might never again receive an offer from a man whose social standing she could respect. (78-9)

Here, Monica is not only considering her position, but is also planning how to make her future more favourable; by seeing her efforts as affective labour, we can better appreciate Monica's mental labours and come to see how these operate above and beyond her more obvious "work."

Initially Monica enjoys the married life; yet, Widdowson soon becomes a jealous, overly criticizing, and controlling husband. According to David, Monica has been "purchased with the guarantee of economic security, and he, the husband, is condemned to constant surveillance lest his goods turn out to be morally defective, or even worse, lest someone make off with them."³⁴ Widdowson is "jealous of her forming new acquaintances" (170) and insists she spend her time tending to domestic chores, entertaining herself with needlework,

³⁴ David 124.

and spending all her time with him, rather than with her friends. He especially doesn't approve of Rhoda Nunn's company, deeming her "unwomanly" (171) and a bad influence on Monica.

In addition to limiting her social events, he begins to lecture her on the position of the woman:

"Woman's sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious. If a woman can neither have a home of her own, nor find occupation in any one else's, she is deeply to be pitied; her life is bound to be unhappy. I sincerely believe that an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man." (171)

In this passage Gissing cleverly addresses the marriage problem by satirising patriarchal conventions through Widdowson's character. Nevertheless, Gissing is unable to offer a plausible solution. Monica never achieves equality with Widdowson in their marriage, and she is never given her independence. Emotionally distraught, and saddened by the separation of her lover Bevis, Monica lapses into exhaustion and disappointment, and eventually dies.

In *The Odd Women*, only two women are able to achieve financial independence and autonomy: Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn. Gissing uses these figures to embody the idea of the financially independent and autonomous female. Their success is attributed to Mary Barfoot's training school, one that has an uncanny similarity to the SPEW. As with the SPEW, Mary's school tries to help middle-class unmarried women achieve financial independence through education: "Her aim was to draw from the overstocked profession of teaching as many capable young women as she could lay hands on, and to fit them for certain

of the pursuits nowadays thrown open to their sex” (63). It specifically targets middle-class women, because it is their upbringing that leaves them unequipped to labour for wages.

Women in the middle classes were brought up preparing for future domestic and maternal duties. Judith Flanders asserts, “[women’s] primary function was to ensure the smooth running of the home, for the benefit of the man who financed it.”³⁵ To secure good husbands, girls were groomed from a very early age. Firstly, a girl’s education was dependent on the governess, and entailed “sewing, knitting and embroidery, besides academic subjects.”³⁶ In addition to domestic training, girls also studied various arts: “deportment, dancing, singing, [and] perhaps a little painting.”³⁷ It is clear then, that middle-class women were brought up solely to succeed in the marriage market. For Gissing, Mary’s school symbolizes the advances in women’s education, and in essence, a possible answer to the odd woman problem.

In addition to teaching women various skills, Mary also gives motivational speeches:

“They will tell you that, in entering the commercial world, you not only unsex yourselves, but do a grievous wrong to the numberless men struggling hard for bare sustenance. You reduce salaries, you press into an already overcrowded field, you injure even your own sex by making it impossible for men to marry, who, if they earned enough, would be supporting a wife.” To-day, continued Miss Barfoot, it was not her purpose to debate the economic aspects of the question. She would consider it from another point of view, repeating, perhaps, much that she had already said to them on other occasions, but doing so because these thoughts had just now very strong possession of her mind....

Because I myself have had an education in clerkship, and have most capacity

³⁵ Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004) 99.

³⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008) 227.

³⁷ Fletcher 279.

for such employment, I look about for girls of like mind, and do my best to prepare them for work in offices. And (here I must become emphatic once more) I am *glad* to have entered on this course. I am *glad* that I can show girls the way to a career which my opponents call unwomanly.” (151-2)

Through this speech Mary displays a certain power in her voice; she expresses her thoughts and experiences in such a creative and emotional manner that she undoubtedly inspires her audience. Mary’s mental, emotional, and creative efforts are indeed affective labour. By denoting them as such, it becomes apparent that while Mary has already achieved independence, her oratory allows her to attain self-fulfilment.

In *The Odd Women*, Gissing addresses the difficulties unmarried women face, and the limited opportunities available for their survival. Despite his critique of society, his sympathy towards these “odd women” is unclear, and he is unable to provide a happy ending for all his characters. Although Gissing’s latter novel, *In the Year of Jubilee*, also examines marriage, it is considered to be less feminist (and less popular) than *The Odd Women*.

In the Year of Jubilee was first published in 1894. While the novel wasn’t as well-received as his previous works, the extant reviews are mostly positive. According to *The Bookman*, “It is a book which every writer and reader must respect, marked by good, thorough work, a very rare knowledge of human nature, the absence of tawdriness, all flabbiness in thinking and sentiment.”³⁸ Enock Knight from *The Herald* asserts, “We still hold to the opinion that *In the Year of Jubilee* is the most natural and the most satisfactory of Mrs. Gissing’s work, although not the most popular, perhaps.”³⁹ For the *Birmingham Daily Post*, the novel is “a work of striking cleverness and originality;”⁴⁰ *The Morning Post* similarly defines the novel as a “clever work.”⁴¹ Yet, according to *The Standard*, “Mr.

³⁸ “Novel Notes,” *The Bookman* [London] May 1895: 54.

³⁹ Enock Knight, “Books and their Makers,” *The Herald* [Los Angeles] 8 May 1898: 31.

⁴⁰ “Three Volume Novels,” *Birmingham Daily Post* [Birmingham] 24 Dec. 1894: 2.

⁴¹ “Recent Novels,” *The Morning Post* [London] 28 Dec. 1894: 2.

Gissing's theories are interesting to read about, but we doubt their efficacy for human wear and tear; perhaps when women are less feminine even than the new woman of to-day, they may be worth considering.... But the novel, as a whole, is a good one, and worth reading."⁴²

On the other hand, the *Liverpool Mercury* offers an unpleasant review: "[Gissing] seems to have a good deal of acquaintance with human nature of the baser sort, but in this book, at any rate, he gives his readers little to admire in the characters he depicts.... *In the Year of Jubilee*—a most misleading title—leaves an unpleasant flavour on the intellectual palate."⁴³

The novel has received very little attention from critics in recent times, but the scholars who do analyse the novel, focus on Gissing's representation of women (specifically Nancy Lord) and his attitude towards lower middle-class life. According to David Kramer, *In the Year of Jubilee* "reveals Gissing's profound, almost revolutionary support for women's pursuit of new employment opportunities as they attempted at the end of the nineteenth century to break down the mainstream Victorian assumptions of division of labour."⁴⁴ Simon J. James asserts that the novel "condemns its female characters' craving for the excitement of public spaces, but is sympathetic to their need to escape their imprisonment of gender and class."⁴⁵ Yet, for Molly Youngkin, *In the Year of Jubilee* "fails to fulfil both 1890s and current liberal-feminist criteria for fully feminist novels."⁴⁶ Constance D. Harsh takes a different approach in analysing the novel, and suggests that "[it] explores the experiences and capacities of Nancy Lord so sensitively and sympathetically that it becomes a powerful indictment of its own patriarchal strategies of containment."⁴⁷ Lastly, Barbara Leah Harman focuses on Gissing's depiction of woman's agency (specifically Nancy's), and marriage:

⁴² "In the Year of Jubilee," *The Standard* [London] 28 Dec. 1894: 2.

⁴³ "Literary Notices," *Liverpool Mercury* [Liverpool] 19 Dec. 1894: 7.

⁴⁴ David Kramer, "George Gissing and Women's Work: Contextualizing the Female Professional," *English Literature in Transition* 43.3 (2000): 317.

⁴⁵ James 125.

⁴⁶ Molly Youngkin, "'All She Knew Was, That She Wished to Live:' Late-Victorian Realism, Liberal-Feminist Ideals, And George Gissing's *In the Year of the Jubilee*," *Studies in the Novel* 36.1 (2004): 75.

⁴⁷ Constance D. Harsh, "Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee* and the Epistemology of Resistance," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34.4 (1994): 873.

“Gissing imagines a marriage of separate, independent persons—neither isolated from each other nor inappropriately merged with each other.... It demonstrates one way in which, in a world where public life has penetrated private relations, the two might be separated and yet might coexist.”⁴⁸ While all these scholars offer valuable interpretations of the novel, I will analyse the labours of Jessica Morgan, Ada Peachy, Beatrice French, and Nancy Lord through the lens of affective labour.

Gissing begins the novel with a very important description of Ada and Arthur Peachey’s home:

Though the furniture was less than a year old, and by no means of the cheapest description, slovenly housekeeping had dulled the brightness of every surface. On a chair laid a broken toy.... Though the time was midsummer, not a flower appeared among the pretentious ornaments. The pictures were a strange medley—autotypes of some artistic value hanging side by side with hideous oleographs framed in ponderous gilding.⁴⁹

In this passage Gissing illustrates, rather contemptuously, the disorder of the house. Not only is it decorated in cheap taste, but it is thoroughly unkempt. Moreover, the depiction of the “broken toy” suggests that a child’s things are neglected. Bearing a close similarity to Charles Dickens’s Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*, Gissing is also criticizing those women who refuse to fulfil their domestic duties as wives and mothers. Gissing’s depiction of Ada further demonstrates his disapproval for her character:

Ada presented herself in a costume which, at any season but high summer, would have been inconveniently cool. Beneath a loose thin dressing-gown her feet, in felt slippers, showed stockingless, her neck was bare almost to the

⁴⁸ Barbara Leah Harman, “Going Public: Female Emancipation in George Gissing’s *In the Year of Jubilee*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34.3 (1992): 365.

⁴⁹ George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*, ed. Paul Delaney (London: J.M. Dent, 1994) 5. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as YOJ.

bosom, and the tresses of pale yellow, upon which she especially prided herself, lay raggedly pinned together on the top of her flat head. She was about twenty-eight years old, but at present looked more than thirty.... Fresh from the morning basin, her cheeks displayed that peculiar colourlessness which results from the habitual use of paints and powders; her pale pink lips, thin and sullen, were curiously wrinkled; she had eyes of slate colour, with lids so elevated that she always seemed to be staring in silly wonder. (YOJ 6-7)

Ada's untidy house resembles her equally slovenly appearance: "raggedly pinned" hair, "flat head," "thin and sullen ... wrinkled" lips. Gissing certainly hasn't given her any redemptive qualities; even her voice is "thin and rather nasal" (7).

In addition to Ada's lack of domesticity, she is also represented as rejecting her maternal role:

For motherhood she had no single qualification but the physical. Before her child's coming into the world, she snarled at the restraints it imposed upon her; at its birth, she clamoured against nature for the pains she had to undergo, and hated her husband because he was the intermediate cause of them. The helpless infant gave her no pleasure, touched no emotion in her heart, save when she saw it in the nurse's care, and received female compliments upon its beauty. She rejected it at night because it broke her sleep; in the day, because she could not handle it without making it cry. (203)

According to John Goode, Ada is a "trapped suburban housewife and we cannot help sensing in the outbursts of rage and petulance a refusal to accept the deadly role she is offered (a role which reproduces that of Monica Widdowson)."⁵⁰ For Gissing, Ada represents the failed feminine ideal; his portrayal of her clearly illustrates his disapproval for women who deny

⁵⁰ John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (London: Vision, 1978) 168.

their appointed roles. Through the lens of affective labour it becomes clear that Ada rejects housework and maternal labours; without this lens, readers would be inclined to think that Ada is an unfit mother and wife, and fail to see her actions are intentional.

Another character who has an unfortunate ending is Jessica Morgan, who is introduced as “overwrought and low spirited” (170). Initially labouring as a governess, Jessica wants to attain financial independence and autonomy through education: “To become B.A., to have her name in the newspapers, to be regarded as one of the clever, uncommon women—for this Jessica was willing to labour early and late, regardless of failing health, regardless even of ruined complexion and hair that grew thin beneath the comb” (18). In fact, her labour is so intense that she suffers from mental and physical exhaustion: “She had had another fainting-fit; her sleep was broken every night with hideous dreams; she ate scarce enough to keep herself alive; a perpetual fever parched her throat and burned at her temples” (189). After taking the exam Jessica is portrayed as “chattering to herself” (189), indicating that she is having a nervous breakdown. As with Mary in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, Jessica’s affective labour, represented in her prolonged mental exertion, is responsible for her demise. Throughout her mental instability Jessica recounts and repeats Samuel’s previous assertion: “She saw the face of Samuel Barmby, and heard his tones—‘the delicacy of a young lady’s nervous system unfits her for such a strain’” (190); the tone in the statement suggests that Gissing isn’t sympathetic towards women who wanted to focus their energies on their careers, rather than marriage. As Liggins asserts, “Diverting his heroine’s potential educational aspirations onto an unattractive minor character he is free to attack, Gissing appears to be using the rapidly deteriorating health of Jessica ... as an example of the dangers of avoiding the sexual instinct necessary for the reproduction of the race.”⁵¹ Although Jessica eventually overcomes her collapse and joins the Salvation Army, Gissing continues to portray

⁵¹ Liggins, *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture* 145.

her in an altogether unfavourable light. Gissing continues his critique of women who seek financial independence and autonomy, through Beatrice French, a successful businesswoman.

At the outset, Gissing introduces Beatrice as a shrewd woman possessing great knowledge for business matters. In the opening pages Beatrice comes up with a “great commercial scheme” (78) which entails opening a Fashion Club for women that will sell expensive fashionable clothing, made with cheap materials. Beatrice and her partner Luckworth Crewe eventually open the South London Fashionable Dress Supply Association, an event which Gissing describes as “an undertaking shrewdly conceived, skilfully planned, and energetically set going” (200). Through affective labour, illustrated in her creative, imaginative, and mental efforts in starting a profitable business, Beatrice has achieved financial success and independence. Nevertheless, Gissing consistently minimises her achievements by taking away her femininity and representing her as masculine. For example, Crewe often refers to Beatrice as “old chap” (78, 80, 213, 214), “old chum” (145, 148), “good fellow” (79), and “old girl” (214), and she is depicted as drinking, smoking, and using “slang” (238). Through Beatrice’s portrayal, Gissing demonstrates his distaste for women who took part in conventionally male endeavours. It is important to note that Beatrice, as with Rhoda Nunn and Miss Barfoot from *The Odd Women*, resemble the New Woman; all three characters have achieved independence (financial and social) in the public sphere, yet Gissing minimises their successes by consistently portraying them as “unwomanly” (TOW 171).

The final character I will be examining is Nancy Lord. Although she too wants to overcome societal constraints, “go about as men do” (YOJ 22), and attain autonomy, her eventual marriage to Lionel Tarrant saves her from being negatively represented. As with Clara Hewett and Monica Madden, Nancy initially attempts to use her beauty for social mobility. Gissing illustrates this idea in a conversation between Nancy and Crewe:

Crewe had his eyes fixed upon [Nancy]; his lips parted hungrily.

“Now that's how I should like to see you painted,” he said all at once. “Just like that! I never saw you looking so well. I believe you're the most beautiful girl to be found anywhere in this London!”

There was genuine emotion in his voice, and his sweeping gesture suited the mood of vehemence. Nancy, having seen that the two or three other people on the platform were not within hearing, gave an answer of which the frankness surprised even herself.

“Portraits for the Academy cost a great deal, you know.”

“I know. But that's what I'm working for. There are not many men down yonder,” he pointed over the City, “have a better head for money-making than I have.”

“Well, prove it,” replied Nancy, and laughed as the wind caught her breath. (88)

Nancy takes advantage of Crewe's attraction for her and assesses his financial capabilities by daring him to “prove” his commitment. Crewe has previously stated that he “rate[s] everything at a market price,” as long as the commodity is “marketable” (86); by asking him how much her beauty is “worth” (89), Nancy is accepting her role as a commodity in the marriage market, and taking part in her exchange. Although she initially seeks to improve her social and financial position through marriage, Nancy rejects Crewe's proposal when she falls in love with Tarrant; she and Tarrant subsequently wed in secret, so that she can still inherit the money from her father's will.

After Tarrant abandons Nancy and her child, Nancy has no choice but to search for a job. Yet, due to her upbringing, employment options are limited. Gissing depicts Nancy's considerations through an inner monologue:

What was there she could do? Teach children, perhaps; but as a visiting governess, the only position of the kind which circumstances left open to her, she could hope for nothing more than the paltriest remuneration. Be somebody's "secretary"? That sounded pleasant, but very ambitious: a sense of incompetency chilled her. In an office, in a shop, who would dream of giving her an engagement?

Walking about the streets of London in search of suggestions, she gained only an understanding of her insignificance. In the battle of life every girl who could work a sewing-machine or make a matchbox was of more account than she.... Of what avail her "education," her "culture"? The roar of myriad industries made mocking laughter at such futile pretensions. (249)

Nancy's middle-class upbringing has prepared her only for marriage; she holds no marketable skills, and her education is only useful for teaching (which offers a meagre wage). Although she does come up with the idea to write "stories" (249), as so many other women have done before her, she decides instead to ask Beatrice for help. Beatrice's aid however, comes with a price: Nancy must reveal the name of her husband. Desperately needing an income that will be sufficient enough to support herself and her child, she agrees to Beatrice's terms and goes on to "advise fools about the fashions, and exhibit [herself] as a walking fashion plate" (307).

Gissing revisits Nancy's aspirations to become a writer towards the end of the novel. After Nancy and Tarrant have been reunited as a family, Nancy reveals her wish to publish a novel she has recently completed. However, rather than be supportive, Tarrant dismisses her work: "The books I praised were literature. Their authors came into the world to write. It isn't enough to be genuine; there must be workmanship. Here and there you have a page of very decent English, and you are nowhere on the level of the ordinary female novelist..." (355). In addition to insulting her efforts, Tarrant continues by insisting that she should be

content in her domestic role as wife and mother: “You, as a woman, have no such duty; nay, it's your positive duty to keep out of the beastly scrimmage” (355). In the end, despite Nancy's goal to attain self-fulfilment and financial royalties, her efforts are obstructed by her husband.

Gissing may have tried to portray Nancy and Tarrant's marriage as an independent and mutual relationship, yet, Tarrant is the only one who has real freedom; he is able to live apart from Nancy without the responsibility of a child, while Nancy stays at home performing domestic and maternal duties. The following passage further illustrates the unequal relationship, and Nancy's oppression:

The manuscript, fruit of such persevering toil, was hidden away, and its author spoke of it no more. But she suffered a grave disappointment. Once or twice a temptation flashed across her mind; if she secretly found a publisher, and if her novel achieved moderate success (she might alter the title), would not Tarrant forgive her for acting against his advice? It was nothing more than advice; often enough he had told her that he claimed no coercive right; that their union, if it were to endure, must admit a genuine independence on both sides. But herein, as on so many other points, she subdued her natural impulse, and conformed to her husband's idea of wifedom. It made her smile to think how little she preserved of that same “genuine independence;” but the smile had no bitterness. (356)

On the surface, it appears that Nancy is wholeheartedly compromising her sense of self and conforming to Tarrant's decisions. However, upon closer inspection, ironic undertones are present. When Tarrant demands Nancy to comply with his wishes, Gissing writes, “She looked up, and commanded her features to the expression which makes whatever woman lovely—that of rational acquiescence” (343). Gissing may appear to be reinforcing

patriarchal conventions, yet, the use of the term “command” suggests that Nancy’s submission is inauthentic. She is consciously repressing her agency and sacrificing her ideals to meet Tarrant’s expectations; her superficial attitude, then, in no way represents her innermost feelings.

Throughout the novel Nancy has used her mental faculties to acquire a proposal from Crewe and plan how to hide her pregnancy from society; she has also used her mental and creative faculties, in addition to her “imagination” (249), to write novels. If we regard all of these efforts as affective labour, it becomes clear that Nancy has laboured to attain self-fulfilment and autonomy, yet she has failed in doing so, due to societal restrictions. In considering Gissing’s female characters in *The Nether World*, *The Odd Women*, and *In the Year of Jubilee*, it becomes clear that women were obstructed from overcoming societal oppression due to limited opportunities. In the next chapter I present three works written by women during the New Woman movement that portray women attaining self-fulfilment and autonomy through affective labour.

Chapter Four: Mona Caird's *The Daughter of Danaus*, Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*, and Catherine L. Pirkis' *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective*

It can scarcely be disputed, I think, that in the English language there are conspicuous at the present moment two words which designate two unmitigated bores: The Workingman and the Woman. The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue; and each is convinced that on its own especial W hangs the future of the world.¹

In 1894, Ouida published an essay that fuelled a public attack on the figure of the New Woman. Yet, even though Ouida was responsible for establishing the phrase “New Woman,” the figure of the New Woman had emerged a decade prior, with Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*.

In the late nineteenth century, specifically between 1880 and 1900, hundreds of novels, short stories, and essays were written about the New Woman. Writers such as Mona Caird, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Menie Muriel Dowie, George Egerton, Sarah Grand, and Olive Schreiner, to name a few, were responsible for beginning what would later be known as New Woman fiction. In contrast with the novels of the early nineteenth century, New Woman fiction strays from the marriage plot, and instead features women trying to escape the constraints of Victorian ideology. Most often, these works represent the New Woman as an aspiring female artist, one who eventually succumbs to the pressures of motherhood and marriage, and finally deserts her career. Lyn Pykett summarises the representation of the female artist in novels as follows:

Typically the female artist figure in the New Woman novel is engaged in a complex negotiation of various forms of self-sacrifice: the sacrifice of the self

¹ Ouida, “The New Woman,” *The North American Review* 158.450 (May 1894): 610. Ouida published this essay as a response to Sarah Grand's “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” It can be suggested that while Ouida defined the term, Grand was responsible for publicising the figure of the New Woman.

to or for art; the accommodation of her aesthetic ambitions to the demands of the marketplace (so that she may provide for herself or for dependent relatives); the subsuming of her own aesthetic or professional ambitions to those of a male relative; the abandonment of them for domestic duties.²

Despite New Woman fiction's ingenuity, there was negative criticism of both the works of this period and the novelists themselves. According to Elaine Showalter, in an effort to damper the movement's impact, critics described New Woman writers and their works as "unwomanly and perverse."³ For many, the New Woman resisted the feminine ideal and thus "represented a threat not only to the social order, but also to the natural order."⁴ For others, the New Woman was a "hysteric, whose degenerate emotionalism was both a symptom and cause of social change."⁵

In previous chapters, I have examined the affective labours of women as depicted in industrial, realist, and sensation novels. In this chapter I will focus on the three texts that exemplify the New Woman tradition. I will first concentrate on the female artist and the affective labours of Hadria Fullerton in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), and Elizabeth (Beth) Caldwell in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897). I will then take a slightly different approach and look at Catherine L. Pirkis' *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (1893). Although Brooke does not engage in labours of the arts, her profession as a detective, and the mental labours she performs while solving cases are certainly pertinent to the new achievements that arose because of the New Woman.

² Lyn Pykett, "Representations of the Female Artist," *Victorian Woman Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 142.

³ Elaine Showalter, introduction, *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin De Siècle*, ed. Showalter (London: Virago, 1993) x.

⁴ Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992) 140.

⁵ Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine* 141.

In 1888, Mona Caird published “Marriage,” an essay in which she defines marriage as a “vexatious failure.”⁶ The essay also promotes “economical independence”⁷ for women, and the “co-education of the sexes.”⁸ Caird continues her criticism of marriage and motherhood in her first novel, *The Daughters of Danaus*. Through Hadria, Caird illustrates the ways in which marriage is detrimental to women’s self-fulfilment. Hadria’s musical talents are compromised as she takes on the role of wife and mother; and although she sets off to pursue her “artistic agency,”⁹ her family ultimately drags her back to a life of subjection and depression.

At the time of its publication, newspapers were highly critical of New Woman fiction, and especially of Caird’s work. *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* considers the novel an example of “silly literature,” and even goes so far as to deem it an elaborate “joke.”¹⁰ The *Pall Mall Gazette*, under a review titled “Stuff and Nonsense,” mocks the novel and its protagonist: “What Hadria Fullerton wants is not quite clear. *She* calls it ‘a new dispensation;’ but that may mean anything—from a change of sex on her own part to a moral and social revolution on the world’s; and Hadria never gets the hang of her ideal well enough to be able to explain it in its fullness to the race.”¹¹ Lastly, *The Standard* not only condemns the novel, but denounces New Woman writers as well:

Hadria Temperley has reached the highest pitch of silly vulgarity and portentous selfishness. She is the worst, but we have no hope that she will prove to be the last, of her species—so far, at any rate, as contemporary fiction

⁶ Mona Caird, “Marriage,” *Westminster Review* [London] Aug. 1888, rpt. in *Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Ontario, Canada: Broadview, 2001) 195-6.

⁷ Caird 196.

⁸ Caird 197.

⁹ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 213.

¹⁰ “Four New Novels,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* [Dublin] 7 Nov. 1894: 6.

¹¹ “Reviews: Stuff and Nonsense,” *The Pall Mall Gazette* [London] 7 Jan. 1895: 4.

is concerned—so far as silly women can find, or can pay, publishers to put their nauseous twaddle into print.¹²

Today, scholars value Caird's radical views on marriage and motherhood, and regard *The Daughters of Danaus* as a representative work of New Woman fiction. For Pykett, *The Daughters of Danaus* "is particularly fierce in its indictment of the covert tyranny of the ideology of self-sacrificial motherhood,"¹³ and for Ann Heilmann, Hadria symbolises "the possibility of autonomous and self-determined mothering."¹⁴ According to Lorelee MacPike, "Hadria's story shows how impossible Caird believes it to be for a woman to repudiate the claims the world makes upon her, in the form of the chain of motherhood."¹⁵ Similarly, Gail Cunningham asserts that Caird "is concerned to show that laudably independent action is inevitably doomed by social constrictions to failure, and its perpetrators consigned to the everlasting pointlessness of feminine conformity."¹⁶ Lisa Surridge takes a different approach and focuses on the text's form: "the novel's dislocations of conventional narrative time reflect Caird's feminist thinking during the 1880s and early 1890s as she attempted to denaturalise the late-Victorian marriage and gender system."¹⁷ While all these interpretations are insightful, I will focus on Hadria's labour of the arts: the emotional, mental, and creative labours she partakes in when composing and playing music, as well as the obstacles she faces when trying to attain independence.

One of the most interesting aspects of this novel is the way in which Caird presents Hadria Fullerton. In the novels previously discussed, Gaskell, Gissing, and Braddon introduce their protagonists with a comprehensive description of their appearances. The

¹² "Some New Novels," *The Standard* [London] 5 Dec. 1894: 2.

¹³ Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine* 146.

¹⁴ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2000) 148.

¹⁵ Lorelee MacPike, "The New Woman, Childbearing, and the Reconstruction of Gender, 1880-1900," *NWSA Journal* 1.3 (1989): 387.

¹⁶ Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978) 70.

¹⁷ Lisa Surridge, "Narrative Time, History, and Feminism in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*," *Women's Writing* 12.1 (2005): 128.

emphasis put on women's beauty is in fact due to the value it holds in the marriage market, and ultimately what enables women to attain successful marriages. However, in *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird considers Hadria's appearance to be insignificant; as such, only a vague description of her heroine is provided: "a slight, dark-haired girl, with a pale, rather mysterious face, and large eyes."¹⁸ Instead, Caird focuses on Hadria's intellect and musical talents. For Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Hadria is a character "who can articulate an ideology rather than fumbling toward personal expression, and yet sound not like an editorial, but rather like an individual necessarily pressed into radical thoughts by a constraining situation...."¹⁹ Indeed, Hadria is an expressive and dynamic character; her language is always intricate and engaging, especially when she is voicing her ideas on marriage, motherhood, and women's oppression. An example of Hadria's clear and eloquent speech is in the opening pages of the novel, where she engages in a conversation with her siblings:

"Do you mean that a girl would have more difficulty in bringing her power to maturity and getting it recognized than a man would have?" asked Fred.

[Hadria] "Yes; the odds are too heavy."

"A second-rate talent perhaps," Ernest admitted, "but not a really big one."

"I should exactly reverse that statement," said Hadria. "The greater the power and the finer its quality, the greater the inharmony between the nature and the conditions; therefore the more powerful the leverage against it. A small comfortable talent might hold its own, where a larger one would succumb. That is where I think you make your big mistake, in forgetting that the greatness of the power may serve to make the greatness of the obstacles."

¹⁸ Mona Caird, *The Daughters of Danaus* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989) 6. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹ Margaret Morganroth Gullette, afterword, *The Daughters of Danaus*, by Mona Caird (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989) 505.

“Surely it only wants a little force of will to enable you to occupy your life in the manner you think best,” said Ernest.

[Hadria] “That is often impossible for a girl, because prejudice and custom are against her.”

“But she ought to despise prejudice and custom,” cried the brother, nobly.

[Hadria] “So she often would; but then she has to tear through so many living ties that restrain her freedom....Ah! *that* particular obstacle has held many a woman suffering, like some wretched insect pinned alive to a board throughout a miserable lifetime! What would Emerson say to these cases? That ‘Nature magically suits the man to his fortunes by making these the fruit of his character’? Pooh! I think Nature more often makes a man’s fortunes a veritable shirt of Nessus which burns and clings, and finally kills him with anguish!” (14-5)

Using Ernest to reflect man’s opposition, and Hadria to reflect her own, Caird sets up a powerful dialogue, one that debates women’s ability to attain self-fulfilment and success. Here, “power” refers to Caird’s concept of “artistic power” (11). For Judith Lowder Newton, “power” is defined “both as achievement and competence and, by implication, as a form of self-definition or self-rule.”²⁰ By applying this definition to the text, it can be assumed that, for Caird, artistic power is having the ability to attain self-fulfilment through one’s creative faculties. Through Hadria, Caird establishes how Victorian conventions hinder women from attaining recognition for their talents.

In the past, “most discussions of women’s musical abilities denied them creative powers but conceded their interpretive ability—‘reproduction’ over originality....”²¹ Here,

²⁰ Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (London: Methuen, 1985) 7.

²¹ Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914: “Encroaching on All Man’s Privileges”* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 27.

Paula Gillett is specifically referring to an essay in *The Musical Times* titled “The Feminine in Music,”²² which establishes that women lack the abilities to compose their own music: “woman does not originate, she only interprets or reproduces.”²³ While this is a rather bold assertion to make, many publications supported the idea that women could never be successful composers. For example, in an essay titled “Women as Composers,” Artiste demonstrates why women can never have artistic or creative power:

My own opinion is that this power does exist in many women, but that it is destroyed, or at least prevented from bearing worthy fruits, by various causes. Firstly, a woman endowed with a lively, excitable imagination, rarely possesses the enormous perseverance and energy necessary for a composer; she cannot climb the steep and weary hill before her, nor struggle against the innumerable disappointments and disheartening obstacles which meet her at every turn—for success and fame are slow in coming to nearly all, but more especially to the composer.²⁴

While it is unclear whether or not Caird was aware of these debates while writing *The Daughters of Danaus*, she certainly addresses them by portraying Hadria as a strong and capable composer. By the end of the novel Hadria fails to become successful as a musician, due to Victorian conventions and family responsibilities—not due to a lack of creativity, nor due to a poor work ethic as the previous articles suggest.

The language in the previous excerpt from *The Daughters of Danaus*, “infliction,” “anguish,” “obstacle,” “helpless,” and “suffering,” illustrates the suffering women endure due to Victorian ideology. In addition, Caird uses several literary techniques to demonstrate women’s confinement; for example, the simile in the sentence “Ah! *that* particular obstacle has held many a woman helpless and suffering, like some wretched insect pinned alive to a

²² Gillett establishes that the article is actually a reprint of a publication by musician Hans von Bulow.

²³ “The Feminine in Music,” *Musical Times* [London] 1 Oct. 1882: 521.

²⁴ Artiste, “Women as Composers,” *Monthly Musical Record* [London] 1 Jul. 1877: 108.

board throughout a miserable lifetime!” directly illustrates the woman’s helplessness. The passage ends with Hadria refuting Emerson’s position on suffering:” I think Nature more often makes a man’s fortunes a veritable shirt of Nessus which burns and clings, and finally kills him with anguish!” Caird likens a woman’s suffering to the painful death of Heracles to fully illustrate her point: there is nothing positive or purposeful about the “anguish” that is brought upon those who are trying to overcome their obstacles.

This long passage is significant because it sets the premise of the novel. Hadria’s musical genius and artistic power will be thwarted by marriage and motherhood. Although Hadria is able to experience a brief musical career, familial obligations force her to desert her dream and return home, where she has an illicit affair, and ultimately falls into depression. The last couple of sentences in the passage foreshadow the ending of the novel; Hadria’s work will never be acknowledged and her spirit will be killed “with anguish.” It is also important to consider the novel’s title and what it alludes to. According to Sally Ledger, “in the Greek myth from which the title is derived, the fifty daughters of Danaus are married *en masse*, and forty-nine of them murder their husbands on their wedding night in order to free themselves. Their punishment is eternally to draw water in sieves from fathomless wells.”²⁵ Although Hadria never kills her husband, she still is punished and doomed to a life of domestic boredom: “Yet she too, it turned out, for all her smiles and her cheerfulness, was busy and weary with futilities. She too, like the fifty daughters of Danaus, was condemned to the idiot’s labour of eternally drawing water in sieves from fathomless wells” (467).

From the outset, Caird demonstrates the difficulties women face when trying to balance domestic duties with their artistic endeavours:

Hadria had determined upon making a strong and patient effort to pursue her work during the winter, while doing her best, at the same time, to please her

²⁵ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 25.

mother....She treated herself austere, and found her power of concentration increasing, and her hold on herself greater. But, as usual, her greatest effort had to be given, not to the work itself, but to win the opportunity to pursue it.... (109)

Although Hadria wants to focus on her music, she struggles to find time to do so, due to her mother's continuous demands. I would also like to point out Caird's use of the word "work," to denote Hadria's musical training. Although "work" often refers to "paid employment," Raymond Williams also asserts that the word "indicate[s] activity and effort or achievement...."²⁶ While Hadria is not receiving compensation for the time she practices her music, her efforts are still considered as a kind of labour. Thus, by using the term affective labour, labours that have been previously disregarded, are now properly recognised.

Hadria's affective labour is most evident when she completes one of her best musical compositions:

She sat up late into the night. Since freedom and solitude could not be had by day, the nights were often her sole opportunity. At such times she would work out her musical ideas, which in the dead silence of the house were brought forth plentifully. These, from her point of view, were the fruitful hours of the twenty-four. Thoughts would throng the darkness like swarms of living things.

Hadria's mood found expression to-night in a singular and most melancholy composition. She called it *Futility*. It was unlike anything that she had ever done before, and she felt that it showed an access of musical power.

(46)

Caird's simile, "Thoughts would throng the darkness like swarms of living things," likens Hadria's "thoughts" to insects buzzing around incessantly. Here, the term affective labour

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988) 335. This is discussed in full in the Introduction.

becomes useful in identifying Hadria's mental, emotional, and creative labours. Hadria uses the imaginative and emotional faculties of her mind to formulate "musical notes" and create her own composition. She names the musical piece "Futility" because she feels useless and despondent in her current situation; yet, paradoxically, her composition has immense "musical power."

Despite her musical achievement, Hadria is tired and overworked from labouring both domestically and affectively. As a result, she considers relinquishing her musical aspirations:

She picked up the score of her music, and stood, with a handful of the once precious offspring of her brain held out towards the flames. Then she drew it back, and half closed her eyes in self-scrutinizing thought. "Come now," she said to herself, "are you sincere in your intention of giving up? Are you not doing this in a fit of spite against destiny? as if destiny cared two straws. Heavens! what a poor little piece of melodrama. And to think that you should have actually taken yourself in it by it. One acts so badly with only oneself for audience. You know perfectly well that you are *not* going to give in, you are *not* going to attempt to stifle that which is the centre of your life; you have not courage for such slow suicide. Don't add insincerity to the other faults that are laid to your account—" She mused over the little self-administered lecture. And probing down into her consciousness, she realized that she could not face the thought of surrender. She meant to fight on. The notion of giving in had been seized instinctively, for a moment of rest. Nothing should really make her cease the struggle, until the power itself had been destroyed. She was sure of it, in her heart, in spite of failures and miserably inadequate expressions of it. Suddenly, as a shaft of light through parting clouds, came bursting forth,

radiant, rejoicing, that sense of power, large, resistless, genial as morning
sunshine. Yes, yes, let them say what they might, discourage, smile, or frown
as they would, the faculty was given to her, and she would fight for
opportunity to use it while she had breath. (113-4)

Hadria's "self-administered lecture" illustrates her frustration. Exhausted physically and mentally by having to balance her music with her domestic duties, she considers burning all her compositions as a way to alleviate her burden. However, she is unable to "face the thought of surrender," and decides to continue pursuing her work as long as she has the artistic "power" to do so; the luminous "shaft of light" that comes through the clouds is her epiphany. Hadria is aware of the obstacles that await, and refuses to let insecurity become her weakness. The anaphora in the passage, "You know perfectly well that you are *not* going to give in, you are *not* going to attempt to stifle that which is the centre of your life; you have not courage for such slow suicide," illustrates Hadria's determination to continue to play her music. Although the preceding lines reflect her doubts, after the anaphora, the tone changes from frantic, to hopeful, and Hadria becomes more logical and reasonable.

As Part I comes to a close, Hadria considers Hubert Temperley's offer of marriage. Even though Hadria has been opposed to marriage from the outset, in an effort to escape her mother and the restrictions of her home, she accepts Temperley's offer. The second part of the novel picks up years later, and the reader discovers that Hadria is married with children. According to Carolyn Christensen Nelson, New Woman fiction developed "the forms of fiction in new ways, using dream sequences, stream-of-consciousness techniques, and innovative narrative methods."²⁷ In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird uses an innovative technique called "the plot gap."²⁸ As Surridge asserts, Caird's "unmarked omission of Hadria's marriage and the birth of her two sons...defies realist fictional conventions and the

²⁷ Carolyn Christensen Nelson, introduction, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. Nelson (Ontario, Canada: Broadview, 2001) xiv.

²⁸ Surridge 134.

ideology which underpins them.”²⁹ Thus, another way in which Caird defies the Victorian narrative is by completely ignoring the processes of marriage and reproduction, and instead focusing on Hadria’s journey to attain independence through her musical talent.

Initially Hadria enters the marriage under the impression that it will be a free union; yet, she soon feels stifled by her marital and motherly obligations. In an attempt to gain back her independence and creativity, she decides to leave her family, and go to Paris to pursue her musical dreams. It is here that Hadria once again engages in affective labour. With the help of M. Jouffroy, who recognizes her artistic “genius” (317), she begins to compose once again, this time with far more discipline and fervour. Yet, despite her dedication and “steady, uninterrupted work” (318), Hadria is unable to gain the attention she deserves. According to M. Jouffroy, her musical pieces are too “eccentric” (320) to be published. As Gillett notes, “Like those who denied women entry to medical schools and other avenues of professional training on the basis of a belief in the necessity of separate spheres, writers on music often described women who attempted to break gender barriers as deviants deserving of severe censure.”³⁰ Even though Hadria composes her own music, her efforts are still obstructed by societal ideals. Desperately in need of money, Hadria begins to write and sell short articles. Yet, the money is insufficient and the continuous beckoning of her family begins to take a toll on her drive. Henriette Temperely’s visit, coupled with her mother’s sickness and her father’s financial problems, ultimately persuade her to return home, despite M. Jouffrey’s objections:

“But I tell you, Madame, that she will drag you back to your fogs; she will tell you some foolish story, she will address herself to your pity. Your family has doubtless become ill. Families have that habit when they desire to achieve something. Bah, it is easy to become ill when one is angry, and so to make

²⁹ Surridge 134.

³⁰ Gillett 22.

oneself pitied and obeyed. It is a common usage. Madame, beware; it is for you the critical moment. One must choose.” (335)

Again Caird uses a metaphor to create an effective image, one that is repeated in the following passage. The “Fogs” represent the looming depression that awaits Hadria; furthermore, Caird’s repetition of the term in the following passage, symbolises Hadria’s imminent artistic demise.

In an episode similar to one at the beginning of the novel, Jouffrey presents Hadria with a choice: her career or her wifely/motherly duties:

“This is the moment for decision. Remain now among us, and pursue your studies with a calm mind, and I promise... you shall have a success beyond the wildest dreams of your ambition. Madame, you do not guess your own power. I know how your genius can be saved to the world; I know the artist’s nature.... I know what feeds and rouses it, and I know what kills it. And this I tell you, Madame, that if you stay here, you have a stupendous future before you; if you return to your fogs and your tea-parties—ah, then, Madame, your genius will die and your heart will be broken.” (336)

According to Pykett, “In the New Woman fiction this conflict between the self-sacrificial womanly vocation on the one hand, and the self-expressive artistic vocation or the productivity demands of the professional career on the other, is more usually a source of tension, frustration, rebellion and/or failure....³¹ For Hadria, the pressures felt by her family continue to overwhelm her in Paris and ultimately she gives in to her traditional womanly duties. However, the desertion of her musical aspirations comes with a price; her musical “genius” and love for composing is destroyed, and Hadria is left depressed and trapped without a chance of attaining autonomy.

³¹ Pykett, “Representations” 143.

Despite Hadria's failure, Caird approaches the novel's ending on a rather hopeful note:

[Hadria] recalled a strange and grotesque vision, or waking-dream, that she had dreamt a few nights before: of a vast abyss, black and silent, which had to be filled up to the top with the bodies of women, hurled down to the depths of the pit of darkness, in order that the survivors might, at last, walk over in safety. Human bodies take but little room, and the abyss seemed to swallow them, as some greedy animal its prey. But Hadria knew, in her dream, that some day it would have claimed its last victim, and the surface would be level and solid, so that people would come and go, scarcely remembering that beneath their feet was once a chasm into which throbbing lives had to descend, to darkness and a living death. (451)

Hadria may symbolise one of those "bodies of women," yet, her failure is necessary. Caird's implication is that, in the future, women will have the ability to attain independence.

Although Caird saves her heroine from physical death, her soul has symbolically died along with her music. At the end of the novel, Hadria uncovers "Futility," her once powerful musical composition, and realises the power it holds:

It expressed with great exactness the feelings that overwhelmed her now, whenever she let her imagination dwell upon the lives of women, of whatever class and whatever kind. Futility! The mournful composition, with its strange modern character, its suggestion of striving and confusion and pain, expressed as only music could express, the yearning and the sadness that burden so many a woman's heart to-day.

She knew that the music was good, and that now she could compose music infinitely better. The sharpness of longing for her lost art cut through her. She half turned from the piano and then went back, as a moth to the flame. (466-7)

“Futility” represents and conveys the struggles and disappointments Hadria, and other women, have faced when trying to attain self-discovery and autonomy. Although Hadria longs to express herself through music once again, she is hindered by her present circumstances. Nevertheless, it is important to establish that Hadria’s compositions are possible through affective labour. Furthermore, Hadria’s mental, emotional, and creative labours have been vital in the realisation and evolution of her artistic power.

In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird explores the ways in which marriage is oppressive and detrimental to women’s self-fulfilment. Hadria is unable to explore her artistic agency and is trapped in a loveless marriage bound by marital and motherly obligations. Caird’s novel, though bleak, is representative of New Woman fiction. Another novel that depicts the New Woman, and this time ensures the protagonist’s success, is *The Beth Book* by Sarah Grand.

In Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* (the full title of which is *The Beth Book: Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman Genius*), Beth Caldwell not only escapes her oppressive marriage, but becomes a successful writer and orator. Despite being written in Bildungsroman form, the majority of the novel focuses on Beth’s childhood and adolescence, rather than on her marriage and subsequent quest for independence. As with her previous essays (especially in “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” in which she attributes women’s oppression to their lack of “proper education”³²), Grand uses the novel to address several concerns: the downfalls resulting from limited educational opportunities, and the dangers in keeping women sexually ignorant. Although Beth is initially portrayed as a

³² Sarah Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” *The North American Review* 158.448 (Mar.1894): 272.

victim of the education system, she eventually surpasses her limitations through affective labour; she writes a successful work, and even becomes an influential and popular orator for the women's movement.

The Beth Book was published in 1897, nearly four years after Grand's most successful novel, *The Heavenly Twins*. At the time of its publication, the novel received mixed reviews. For *The Morning Post*, *The Beth Book* is "inferior in brightness, romance, wit, and poetry as it is equal in the unpleasantness of the predominant theme."³³ Similarly, the *Daily Mail* asserts that Grand's "literary technique still leaves much to be desired," yet views the novel as "a fine piece of work, roughly hewn."³⁴ Lastly, although *The Woman's Signal* offers an in depth review of the novel, it is not altogether complimentary:

Sarah Grand does not fear to admit that she writes her novels with a purpose, but, unfortunately, from the moment the purpose enters in, the art is destroyed.... If Sarah Grand will in the future forget the possibilities of a work of fiction for polemical purposes she will probably take her place amongst the very best novelists of even this the Great Victorian novelists' era.³⁵

Today, *The Beth Book* is still overshadowed by its predecessor, and as a result, scholarship isn't extensive. For Lyssa Randolph, *The Beth Book* "explores the possibility of female emancipation and contested gender roles whilst endorsing marriage and motherhood...."³⁶

Angelique Richardson also focuses on Grand's attitude towards marriage and asserts, "Grand's parables of mistaken marriages were not an attack on the sacred institution of marriage itself, nor a call to women to leave their domestic roles; instead, she was

³³ "Books of the Day," *The Morning Post* [London] 11 Nov. 1897: 2.

³⁴ "The World of Books," *Daily Mail* [London] 9 Nov. 1897: 3.

³⁵ "The Beth Book," *The Woman's Signal* [London] 2 Dec. 1897: 354.

³⁶ Lyssa Randolph, "The Child and the 'Genius': New Science in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*," *Victorian Review* 26.1 (2000): 64.

demonstrating the importance of responsible, eugenic sexual selection.”³⁷ Other scholars focus on Grand’s portrayal of the female artist. According to Showalter, Grand successfully “describe[s] the creative psychology of the woman artist,”³⁸ and Pykett similarly asserts that the novel “offers one of the most sustained representations of the sensibility of the woman artist.”³⁹ Although all these scholars offer valuable and insightful interpretations of the novel, I will examine Beth’s affective labour and demonstrate how this labour enables her to attain success as a writer and orator.

One of main objectives of *The Beth Book* is to shed light on the importance of education. According to Iveta Jusova, Grand used her novels to “point out the crippling effects of limited educational and career opportunities available for even the best equipped women, and to challenge the lack of medical and sexual instruction in women’s upbringing.”⁴⁰ Grand exposes and criticises the education system by modelling the Royal Service School in her novel, on the schools that existed for women at the time:

Most of the girls at the Royal Service School would have to work for themselves, and teaching was almost the only occupation open to them, yet such education as they received, consisting as it did of mere rudiments, was an insult to the high average of intelligence that obtained amongst them. They were not taught one thing thoroughly, not even their own language, and remained handicapped to the end of their lives for want of a grounding in grammar. When you find a woman's diction at fault, never gird at her for want

³⁷ Angelique Richardson, “The Eugenization of Love: Sarah Grand and the Morality of Genealogy,” *Victorian Studies* 42.2 (2000): 248.

³⁸ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977): 169.

³⁹ Pykett, *The Improper Feminine* 178.

⁴⁰ Iveta Jusova, “Imperialist Feminism: Colonial Issues in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 43.3 (2000): 300.

of intelligence, but at those in authority over her in her youth, who thought anything in the way of education good enough for a girl.⁴¹

And again,

There was no monotony in Miss Blackburne's establishment. The girls were taken in turns to operas, concerts, picture-galleries, and every kind of exhibition that might help to cultivate their minds. To be able to discuss such things was a part of their education. They were expected to describe all they saw, fluently and pleasantly, but without criticism enough to require thought and provoke argument, which is apt to be tedious.... Geraldine had not exaggerated when she called Miss Blackburne's school a forcing house for the marriage market. At that time marriage was the only career open to a gentlewoman, and the object of her education was to make her attractive. The theory then was that solid acquirements were beyond the physical strength of girls, besides being unnecessary. Showy accomplishments, therefore, were all that was aimed at.... Music, singing, drawing, dancing, French, German, Italian—whatever it might be.... (318)

Grand describes the school as a “forcing house for the marriage market,” because girls are being trained to attract suitable men, rather than being taught skills for possible future employment. By denying women a well-rounded education, one comparable to men’s, society is reinforcing Victorian ideals. It is obvious, then, why Grand was so adamant in exposing this inequality.

Grand further demonstrates the disadvantages in receiving an inadequate education when Beth compares her knowledge with that of her brother’s friends:

⁴¹ Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book: Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius* (London: Virago, 1980) 296. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Beth, perceiving that [men's] superiority was not innate, tried to discover how it was acquired that she might cultivate it. Gathering from their attitude towards her ignorance that this superiority rested somehow on a knowledge of the Latin grammar, she hunted up an old one of her brother's and opened it with awe, so much seemed to depend on it. Verbs and declensions came easily enough to her, however. The construction of the language was puzzling at the outset; but, with a little help, she soon discovered that even in that there was nothing occult. Any industrious, persevering person could learn a language, she decided; and then she made more observations. She discovered that, in the estimation of men, feminine attributes are all inferior to masculine attributes. Any evidence of reasoning capacity in a woman they held to be abnormal, and they denied that women were ever logical....

This persistent endeavour to exalt themselves by lowering women struck Beth as mean, and made her thoughtful. She began by respecting their masculine minds as much as they did themselves; but then came a doubt if they were any larger and more capable than the minds of women would be if they were properly trained and developed.... (273-4)

The language in this passage resembles that of a scientific experiment, or a mathematical, or even ethical, proof equation. The words, "discover," "observations," "estimation," and "evidence," give this passage the impression of a scientific report. Moreover, since Beth is trying to discover "how [intelligence and superiority were] acquired," her Latin textbook and herself (as a test subject) do resemble experimental materials. There is also a hint of irony in the line, "She began by respecting their masculine minds as much as they did themselves." This sentence suggests that men don't even highly respect themselves (nor their minds), therefore she will respect them only so much. This line, in conjunction with "This persistent

endeavour to exalt themselves by lowering women struck Beth as mean, and made her thoughtful,” acts as the conclusion or theorem deduced from her investigation. Beth concludes with the comforting thought that men convince women of inferiority just to “exalt” themselves, and that since men have low self-respect, she shouldn’t give them more credit than they deserve. According to Murphy, “masculine control over language and interpretation provides the vehicle for maintaining women in an inferior position.”⁴² Nevertheless, Grand’s carefully developed prose indicates that not only is Beth sharp and perceptive, but she exercises control over language in the way that Grand does in this passage.

In addition to stressing the importance of women’s education, Grand also addresses how women were kept in the dark about sexual matters, as a way to further oppress them. As Heilmann points out, “by keeping middle-class girls and women ignorant of the physical side of marriage and of their husbands’ past, society condones middle class men’s sexual exploits among working-class women.”⁴³ Not only did Grand criticise the implementation of women’s sexual ignorance, but she also objected to The Contagious Diseases Acts. According to Showalter, The Contagious Diseases Acts (1864-1884) were established to “control syphilis by enforced examination, detection, and treatment of prostitutes in garrison towns.”⁴⁴ Yet, while women were being brutalized, men were exempt from treatment and discrimination, even while spreading venereal diseases to their inexperienced and naïve wives. Moreover, the doctors working in the Lock Hospital, “in which prostitutes were confined for examination and treatment,”⁴⁵ were the ones most responsible for violating women. Grand explores men’s brutality of women through Beth’s husband, who is a vivisectionist and “in charge of the Lock Hospital” (398):

⁴² Patricia Murphy, “Reevaluating Female ‘Inferiority:’ Sarah Grand versus Charles Darwin,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26.2 (1998): 230.

⁴³ Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* 79.

⁴⁴ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* 334.

⁴⁵ Showalter 153.

“Good authorities say that nothing useful has been discovered by vivisection that could not have been discovered without it,” Beth rejoined. “And even if it had been the means of saving human life, that would not justify your employment of it.... Had I known you were a vivisector, I should not only have refused to marry you, I should have declined to associate with you. To conceal such a thing from the woman you were about to marry was a cruel injustice—a fraud.”

“I concealed nothing from you that you were old enough to understand and take a right view of,” Dan protested.

“According to custom,” said Beth. “Anything that might prevent a woman accepting a man is carefully concealed from her.... You did not think me too young to put at the head of a house, or to run the risk of becoming a mother.... But that is the way with men. For anything that suits their own convenience they are ingenious in finding excuses. As a rule, they see but one side of a social question, and that is their own. I cannot understand any but unsexed women associating with vivisectors. Don't pretend you pursue such experiments reluctantly—you delight in them....” (440-1)

While Dan insists that he concealed his career from Beth because she was not “old enough to understand,” it is clear that it was done so as not to compromise the marriage. Through Beth, Grand is able to attack the supposed need for “concealment:” if women aren’t “too young to [be] put at the head of a house, or to run the risk of becoming a mother,” then they should be old enough to learn about sexual matters as well. According to Norma Clarke, “Grand wanted women to work together to banish that ignorance about sex which could lead a girl into

unwittingly marrying a man who had venereal disease.”⁴⁶ Not only was sexual awareness necessary to protect women and their children from potentially contracting the disease, but it was also a way for women to fight against subjection.

As Beth begins to understand her financial dependency on her husband, and the overall constraints of marriage, she searches for a place to call her own. The discovery of the “secret chamber” (347) is what marks the beginning of her road towards independence. As Showalter asserts, Beth is in need of “solitude and secrecy; she is at a disadvantage in education and economic position, and her husband ridicules her efforts to write.”⁴⁷ It is in the privacy of this room that she begins her affective labour, while writing a novel for possible publication:

Her mind, wonderfully fertilised, teemed again—not with vain imaginings, however, as heretofore, but with something more substantial. Purposeful thought was where the mere froth of sensuous seeing had been; and it was thought that now clamoured for expression instead of the verses and stories—fireworks of the brain, pleasant, transient, futile distractions with nothing more nourishing in them than the interest and entertainment of the moment—which had occupied her chiefly from of old. It was natural to Beth to be open, to discuss all that concerned herself with her friends; but having no one to talk to now, she began on a sudden to record her thoughts and impressions in writing; and having once begun, she entered upon a new phase of existence altogether. She had discovered a recreation which was more absorbing than anything she had ever tried before; for her early scribbling had been of another kind, not nearly so entrancing.... Like many another earnest person, she mistook the things of no importance for things that matter because the doing of them cost

⁴⁶ Norma Clarke, “Feminism and the Popular Novel of the 1890s: A Brief Consideration of a Forgotten Feminist Novelist,” *Feminist Review* 20 (1985): 96.

⁴⁷ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* 170.

her much; and it was the intellectual exercise, the delicate fancy work of her brain, a matter of enormous consequence, that she neglected. Not knowing that *“If a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him,”* she made the fitting of herself for the work of her life her last exercise at the tired end of the day. She rose early and went to bed late in order to gain a little more time to write, but never suspected that her delight in the effort to find expression for what was in her mind of itself proclaimed her one of the elect. (357-8)

In the first four lines of the passage, the language and metaphors invoke nature, specifically the natural growing process: “her mind wonderfully fertilized, teemed again,” “froth of sensuous,” “futile distractions with nothing more nourishing.” There are also vivid words like “clamoured” and “fireworks” that serve to show just how drastic of a change is taking place. In addition, in the first sentence Grand describes Beth’s ideas as “fireworks of the brain” that appear and explode in an effort to be expressed. Grand is also suggesting that idle “imaginings” were the only, or pinnacle, of thought that women were supposed to be capable of; by having Beth think of something more “substantial,” Grand is distancing herself from the previous inferior accounts of women’s minds in a striking and powerful way.

Due to her inability to discuss her thoughts with her dominant and demeaning husband, Beth begins to “record her thoughts and impressions” in writing; this “intellectual exercise” is the start of her affective labour. Although Grand considered writing to be tedious, Beth welcomes the challenge and views it as a pleasure: “Duty she conceived to be a painful effort necessarily, but writing was a pleasure.” The quotation towards the end, *“If a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him,”* emphasizes this point; Beth is more than willing to sacrifice other aspects of her life, to afford herself the necessary time to engage in her writing. Grand also considers Beth one of

“the elect.” In religion, the elect were those chosen by God for salvation. However, Oscar Wilde’s definition in his preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, suggests otherwise.

According to Wilde, “the elect” were artists, or those who could create “beautiful things,” and who could also “find beautiful meanings in beautiful things.”⁴⁸ Thus, Grand is setting up a debate between the old, religious idea of the elect and the new one of artistic expression.

Beth’s passion for writing may be strong, yet, she believes her written work to be insignificant, and not good enough to be published. This changes when she is presented with “the possibility of making a [writing] career for herself” (369). Excited by the prospect of being able to pay her debts through writing, rather than embroidery, she begins to apply herself with fervour:

Her mind, which had run riot, fancy-fed with languorous dreams in the days when grew gradually stronger as she exercised it....Under the influence of nourishing books, her mind, sustained and stimulated, became nervously active.... From the time she began to think of the style and diction of prose as something to be separately acquired, the spontaneous flow of her thoughts was checked and hampered, and she expended herself in fashioning her tools, as it were, instead of using her tools to fashion her work. When, in her reading, she came under the influence of academic minds, she lost all natural freshness, and succeeded in being artificial. Her English became turgid with Latinities. She took phrases which had flowed from her pen, and were telling in their simple eloquence, and toiled at them, turning and twisting them until she had laboured all the life out of them; and then, mistaking effort for power, and having wearied herself, she was satisfied. Being too diffident to suspect that she had any natural faculty, she conceived that the more trouble she gave

⁴⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) xxiii.

herself the better must be the result; and consequently she did nothing worth the doing except as an exercise of ingenuity. She was serving her apprenticeship, however—making her mistakes. (370-71)

It is in this passage that Beth's affective labour is evident. Although Grand's use of the terms "labour" and "toil" imply hard work, Beth isn't being paid for her efforts, as suggested by the term "apprenticeship." By using the term affective labour, Beth's writing can be understood as labour involving mental and creative faculties. Although Beth's confidence in her writing is growing, she has trouble believing that her own voice is important. This is why she initially tries to read various authors and mimic their rhetoric. Nevertheless, despite her initial troubles, she becomes confident in her innate talent, and her completed work is even promised publication.

With the promise of her work's publication, and the "fifty pounds [made] by her beautiful embroideries" (394), Beth leaves her husband and her oppressive marriage and moves to London. Yet, despite the "very respectable success" that comes with her book being published, Beth's attitude towards her writing changes: "her enthusiasm had singularly cooled; it had ceased to be a pleasure, and become an effort to her to express herself in that way" (516). With Angelica's help, Beth finds orating to be her new medium of expression:

She was going as a stopgap to speak at a large meeting to oblige Angelica. She had the credit of being able to speak, and she herself supposed that she could in a way, because of the success of her first attempt....

Late that night after the meeting she returned to her cottage alone, cowering in a corner of the Kilroys' carriage. She was cowering from the recollection of a great crowd that rose with deafening shouts and seemed to be rushing at her—cowering, too, from the inevitable which she had been forced to recognise—her vocation—discovered by accident, and with dismay, for it

was not what she would have chosen for herself in any way had it occurred to her that she had any choice in the matter. There were always moments when she would fain have led the life which knows no care beyond the cultivation of the arts, no service but devotion to them, no pleasure like the enjoyment of them,—a selfish life made up of impersonal delights, such as music, which is emotion made audible, painting, which is emotion made visible, and poetry, which is emotion made comprehensible;—and such a life could not have been anything but grateful to one like Beth, who had the capacity for so many interests of the kind. She was debarred from all that, however, by grace of nature. Beth could not have lived for herself had she tried. So that now, when the call had come, and the way in which she could best live for others was made plain to her, she had no thought but to pursue it. (524)

Although Beth is initially hesitant in talking to such a large group, the “the recollection of a great crowd that rose with deafening shouts and seemed to be rushing at her” validates her ability to speak with conviction, and inspire others. According to Heilmann, “when Beth projects the power and rhythm of her voice to impress her beliefs on her audience, she stages a public performance not so very dissimilar to that of an actor, musician or singer.”⁴⁹ Grand explains the various ways that emotion is displayed through the arts “such as music, which is emotion made audible, painting, which is emotion made visible, and poetry, which is emotion made comprehensible.” Thus, Beth’s orating is affective labour in the same way that labouring in the arts through music, singing, acting and painting is: it uses the emotional, creative, and mental faculties to express ideas and convey them in a way that will influence others. Her new found career as an orator for the feminist movement gives her the chance to act out her ideas and instil them in her audience: “She had been misled herself, and so had

⁴⁹ Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* 189.

every one else, by her pretty talent for writing, her love of turning phrases, her play on the music of words. The writing had come of cultivation, but this—the last discovered power—was the natural gift” (525). It is through this career that she is finally able to “realize her potential [and] achieve both public (political) and personal (emotional) fulfilment,”⁵⁰ as well as attain independence.

Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* and Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* clearly share similarities, primarily because both novels depict women who engage in the affective labours of the arts: Beth aspires to become a writer, while Hadria struggles to publish her musical compositions. In addition, both Beth and Hadria enter marriages in which they become oppressed by their husbands and/or family, hindering their professional aspirations. Although Hadria is unable to escape the constrictions of marriage and attain independence, Beth’s success as a writer and orator shows that women were gaining new opportunities that would enable them to overcome their oppression. The final work I will be considering in this chapter may not have any immediate similarities with Caird’s and Grand’s novels, yet, it is striking achievement of the late nineteenth-century. Catherine L. Pirkis’ *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* is a remarkable text not only because it portrays one of the first female detectives in literature, but it does so before women had the opportunity to consider police work as a possible career.

Loveday Brooke is a single woman who doesn’t engage in affective labours through art; rather, she engages in mental affective labours while detecting and solving crimes. Although Loveday works as a detective, she is significant not only because she is in a profession where women have yet to be accepted, but because her ability to solve crimes successfully gains her recognition. Moreover, as Kathleen Gregory Klein asserts, “With obligations to no one but herself and her profession, Brooke chooses how she will spend her

⁵⁰ Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* 189.

time. She has neither marital, parental, nor familial obligations to hinder her movement and thoughts; she does no conventional women's work."⁵¹ Thus, she has the ability to apply herself completely to her profession.

While there is relatively little scholarship on female detectives in the late nineteenth century, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* is generally regarded as the first set of stories that portrayed a professional female detective. Originally published as separate stories in London's *Ludgate Monthly* in 1893, it was only in 1894 that "Hutchinson & Company published all seven stories in a collection entitled *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, with ink-and-wash drawings by the unaccountably popular illustrator Bernard Higham."⁵² At this time, the work was subject to mixed reviews. *Liverpool Mercury* not only refers to the author by the wrong name, "Mr. Parkes" rather than Pirkis, but concludes the review with "While pleasant enough, it is doubtful if Mr. Parkes's little stories are up to the standard required."⁵³ Similarly, although *The Pall Mall Gazette* deems the work "as good if not better than most volumes of this sort," it still views it as an imitation of *Sherlock Holmes*: "The idea is the same as Mr. Conan Doyle's, though no doubt prompted by an uneasy desire to avoid the charge of plagiarism, the author has made his central figure a lady detective.... The fact is, we get wearied with these stories."⁵⁴ For the *Glasgow Herald*, "Miss Loveday Brooke continues to outshine the detective Sherlock Holmes in preternatural prescience;" yet, the reviewer is quick to criticise Loveday's character: "We are just afraid Miss Brooke is too clever in catching criminals ever to catch a husband."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, a year later, the *Glasgow Herald* alters its attitude towards the work, and offers a glowing review:

⁵¹ Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995) 70.

⁵² Michael Sims, *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime: Forgotten Cops and Private Eyes from the Time of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Penguin, 2011) 105.

⁵³ "Literary Notices," *Liverpool Mercury* [Liverpool] 4 Apr. 1894: 7.

⁵⁴ "Reviews," *The Pall Mall Gazette* [London] 6 Apr. 1894: 4.

⁵⁵ "The May Magazines," *Glasgow Herald* [Glasgow] 11 May 1893: 10.

“[Brooke’s] intuition, her wide knowledge, her unfailing perspicuity, entitle her to quite an honourable place in her profession... Nothing is too small to afford her a hint; no mystery is too great for her to unveil.... Mr. (or Miss) Pirkis has produced a readable and interesting book full of strange matters, and we believe there are plenty of people who do not find enough mystery in the newspapers or in the lives around them, and find delectation and, perhaps, education in the tracking of paper criminals.”⁵⁶

Recently, critics have also debated whether or not Loveday represents the odd woman, or the New Woman. According to Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, Loveday Brooke is “the only one of the 1890s lady detectives who was unmarried and unspoken for, and of whom there is never any indication that she would consider marriage.”⁵⁷ Joseph A. Kestner also comments on Loveday’s status, comparing her to one of Gissing’s characters in *The Odd Women*, rather than a figure representative of the New Woman: Brooke is “unmarried, self-sufficient, engaged in a profession, without any attachments which might hinder or delay her work.... She is completely self-defining and self-determining.”⁵⁸ Conversely, Therie Hendrey-Seabrook claims that Brooke “demonstrates the levels of independence, both intellectual and practical, that might possibly be achieved by the New Woman.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, these scholars applaud Pirkis’ ability to create a character similar to that of Sherlock Holmes, encompassing the intelligence typically associated with professional men of that time. Other scholars insist that Pirkis’ protagonist doesn’t challenge Victorian conventions as much as the heroines of other New Woman novels. For Carla T. Kungl, Loveday fails to embody the New

⁵⁶ “Literature,” *Glasgow Herald* [Glasgow] 22 March 1894: 9.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “Trouble with She-Dicks: Private Eyes and Public Women in *The Adventures of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (Nov. 2005): 48.

⁵⁸ Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock’s Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) 72.

⁵⁹ Therie Hendrey-Seabrook, “Reclassifying the Female Detective of the *fin de siècle*: Loveday Brooke, Vocation, and Vocality,” *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 26.1 (2007): 77.

Woman because she uses “traditional womanly traits to succeed;”⁶⁰ thus, Pirkis isn’t pushing “culturally-prescribed professional boundaries.”⁶¹ While Loveday does use her knowledge of the domestic sphere to solve crimes, her position in a male-dominated field more than qualifies as New Woman material. Moreover, Pirkis’ protagonist uses her sex to her advantage, transforming herself in various roles and going undetected when solving cases.

As I previously mentioned, Pirkis created Loveday years before women could actually work in the police force, and even years before they were to be paid for their labour. According to Miller, while some women were “employed as wardens in women’s prisons”⁶² in 1883, “their official recognition [in the police force was] in 1918.”⁶³ Initially “women police began solely as volunteers, having been brought in by private organizations wishing to see their presence in their town.”⁶⁴ However, in 1915, “two women stationed at Grantham were sworn in as members of the police force...paid out of police funds, and worked under the orders of the Chief Constable.”⁶⁵ It is important to mention that policewomen “were recruited largely from the middle-and upper-classes....”⁶⁶ Therefore, despite Kungl’s apprehension in identifying the figure of the female detective with that of the New Woman, their class and level of education, as well as their independence, prove otherwise.

Throughout the stories, Loveday is seen solving crimes on her own; and although her job requires her to travel even sometimes at night, she does so without the help of any male figure. In the previous chapter, I discuss how women who labour for money in the public sphere, are likened to the figure of the prostitute. Similarly, Loveday’s paid profession and social mobility, “moving constantly between train and cab ... village and city,”⁶⁷ lead to her

⁶⁰ Carla T. Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006) 61.

⁶¹ Kungl 60.

⁶² Miller 52.

⁶³ Kungl 47.

⁶⁴ Kungl 48.

⁶⁵ Kungl 48.

⁶⁶ Kungl 51.

⁶⁷ Sims 103.

compromised reputation. Miller expands on this idea by explaining that “The female criminal’s connection to labour in late-Victorian criminal theory not only links [Loveday] to the sex worker, but also, conversely, establishes her as unsexed or masculinised because of her participation in the male sphere of work outside her home.”⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Loveday’s refusal to be oppressed by Victorian social and cultural standards further associates her with the figure of New Woman.

In the first story of the collection, “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step,” Pirkis tells the reader that Loveday is “a little over thirty years of age.”⁶⁹ Pirkis proceeds to give a short but telling physical account of her protagonist:

She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript; her one noticeable trait was a habit she had, when absorbed in thought, of dropping her eyelids over her eyes till only a line of eyeball showed, and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window. (4)

Pirkis describes her heroine according to a list of negations, ultimately resulting in Loveday’s “nondescript” appearance. This depiction is, in fact, purposeful. It is Loveday’s ordinariness that aids her in her job as a detective, allowing her to be able to transform herself in whatever character she sees fit. Pirkis continues her introduction by explaining how Loveday came to be a detective:

Some five or six years previously, by a jerk of Fortune's wheel, Loveday had been thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless. Marketable accomplishments she had found she had none, so she had forthwith defied convention, and had chosen for herself a career that had cut her off sharply from her former associates and her position in society. For five or six years

⁶⁸ Miller 56.

⁶⁹ Catherine Louisa Pirkis, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective* (Gloucestershire: Dodo Publications, 2009) 4. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

she drudged away patiently in the lower walks of her profession; then chance, or, to speak more precisely, an intricate criminal case, threw her in the way of the experienced head of the flourishing detective agency in Lynch Court. He quickly enough found out the stuff she was made of, and threw her in the way of better-class work—work, indeed, that brought increase of pay and of reputation alike to him and to Loveday. (4)

While Pirkis' description is again ambiguous, several inferences can be made. Since Loveday is left "penniless" by "a jerk of Fortune's wheel," we can assume that she previously had money and many friends; this indicates that she came from a middle or upper class background. Subsequently, Pirkis establishes that Loveday lacks "marketable accomplishments." According to Hendrey-Seabrook, "the use of the term accomplishment here, rather than the more employment-related skill, is an indicator of a leisured lifestyle where women learned only to present themselves as marriageable and decorative commodities."⁷⁰ It can then be assumed that Loveday comes from a reasonably wealthy background. Despite losing her money and status, Loveday never considers marriage as a viable option; instead, she decides to work in the agency at an entry level position. Pirkis' use of the term "profession" to describe Loveday's work, is also significant. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a "profession" is "the occupation which one professes to be skilled in and to follow; a vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application; any calling or occupation by which a person habitually earns his living."⁷¹ Although Loveday's career is paid, the strategic thinking, reasoning, and mental labour she engages in can be determined as being primarily affective. While I will not discuss all the stories in the collection, I will analyse the different affective labours that aid Loveday in detecting crime.

⁷⁰ Hendrey-Seabrook 80.

⁷¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

Gaining a more solid position in the agency, and in turn a good “reputation” (4), infers that Loveday has gained success as a detective due to her skills. In fact, Ebenezer Dyer, the head of the agency, praises her professional ability:

“Too much of a lady, do you say?” he would say to anyone who chanced to call in question those qualifications. “I don’t care twopence-halfpenny whether she is or is not a lady. I only know she is the most sensible and practical woman I ever met. In the first place, she has the faculty—so rare among women—of carrying out orders to the very letter: in the second place, she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly, and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius—positively to genius, sir.” (5)

Loveday is portrayed as having virtues, such as intelligence and shrewdness, that in the past weren’t valued in women. Moreover, she is able to solve cases successfully and on her own.

In addition to Loveday’s “chain of reasoning” (25) and deductive thinking, she is also very strategic in planning her introduction to those suspected of a crime. In “A Princess’s Vengeance,” she prefers to not be introduced to the household initially: “‘Don’t introduce me at all at first,’ answered Loveday. ‘Get me into some quiet corner, where I can see without being seen. Later on in the afternoon, when I have had time to look round a little, I’ll tell you whether it will be necessary to introduce me or not’” (107). After critically surveying the scene, and the behaviour of those present, Loveday decides to be introduced to the group.

“That is a most interesting group,” [Loveday] said; “now, if you like, you may introduce me to your mother.”

“Oh, with pleasure- under what name?” [the Major] asked.

“Under my own,” she answered, “and please be very distinct in pronouncing it, raise your voice slightly so that every one of those persons

may heart it. And then, please add my profession, and say I am here at your request to investigate the circumstances connected with Mdlle. Cunier's disappearance." (113)

While this may appear as a curious introduction, Loveday's insistence to be presented under her own name and profession has a distinct purpose, one she explains at the end of the story:

"My motive for so doing was simply, as it were, to raise the sudden cry, 'The enemy is upon you,' and to set every one of those five persons guarding their weak point- that is, if they had one. I'll draw your attention to what followed. Mr. Cassimi remained nonchalant and impassive; your mother and Lady Gwynne exchanged glances, and they both simultaneously threw a nervous look at Lady Gwynne's hat lying on the chair. Now as I had stood waiting to be introduced to Mrs. Druce, I had casually read the name of Madame Céline on the lining of the hat and I at once concluded that Madame Céline must be a very weak point indeed; a conclusion that was confirmed when Lady Gwynne hurriedly seized her hat and as hurriedly departed. Then the Princess scarcely less abruptly rose and left the room, and Lebrun on the point of entering, quitted it also. When he returned five minutes later, with the claret-cup, he had removed the ring from his finger, so I had now little doubt where his weak point lay." (124-5)

It is clear that Loveday wants to observe and analyse the initial reactions of the people in the room. The way the Major's "mother and Lady Gwynne exchanged glances," and subsequently nervously looked at "Lady Gwynne's hat lying on the chair," attract her attention, and bring her closer to solving the crime. The mental labouring necessary to strategically plan an introduction in order to obtain the desired effect of the people is one of the many affective labours Loveday performs while solving cases.

In the “The Murder at Troyte’s Hill,” the reader learns how Loveday approaches a new case. She says “‘I start on my work without theory of any sort-in fact, I may say, with my mind a perfect blank’” (37); this proves that Loveday treats every case without any preconceived notions. A story that illustrates Loveday’s unbiased approach is “The Redhill Sisterhood.” As Inspector Gunning familiarizes Loveday with the case, he lets his preconceived notions show when he deems Sister Monica guilty for the crime, solely based on her appearance: “‘By-the-way, I have heard of a man’s face being enough to hang him, but until I saw Sister Monica’s, I never saw a woman’s face that could perform the same kind of office for her. Of all the lowest criminal types of faces I have ever seen, I think hers is about the lowest and most repulsive’” (71). Loveday, however, refuses to let Sister Monica’s “coarse-featured and generally repellent face” (74) persuade her into believing her to be the suspect. At the end, when she solves the case, Dyer asks her to explain how she knew Gunning’s hypothesis was wrong.

[Inspector Dyer] “In the final place, I would like to know what it was that diverted your suspicions from the unfortunate Sisters?”

“The way in which they handled the children,” answered Loveday promptly. “I have seen female criminals of all kinds handling children, and I have noticed that although they may occasionally-even this is rare-treat them with a certain rough sort of kindness, of tenderness they are utterly incapable. Now Sister Monica, I must admit, is not pleasant to look at; at the same time, there was something absolutely beautiful in the way in which she lifted the little cripple out of the cart, put his tiny thin hand round her neck, and carried him into the house.” (96)

According to Miller, “Brooke’s removal of suspicion from Sister Monica is typical of the stories’ general defence of women who are regularly marginalized because of appearance,

class, occupation, or nationality.”⁷² Miller continues by pointing out that “one of the central radical qualities of Pirkis’ series of stories is her refusal, unlike contemporaries, to blame crime on ‘the usual suspects:’ the ugly, unattractive, the poor, and the foreign are all exonerated by Loveday Brooke.”⁷³ Loveday’s knowledge of criminals’ tendencies and patterns, in addition to her elimination of any preconceived notions before looking at a new case, certainly aid her in her profession. Sometimes, even her familiarity with the domestic, private sphere, allows her to solve the case. In this instance, Loveday’s observation of the caring way the Sisters “handle the children,” is perhaps a clue that might have escaped a man analysing the same scene.

As with most detectives, Loveday’s deductive reasoning and careful analysis of clues enable her to solve crimes successfully. Loveday’s deductive process is most evident in “Drawn Daggers,” when Mr Hawke asks her how she knew “Mary O’ Grady was playing the part of Miss Monroe” (150). Utilizing her familiarity with domestic processes she concludes:

“Not immediately. My suspicions were excited, certainly; and when I went up to her room, in company with Mrs. Hawke's maid, those suspicions were confirmed. The orderliness of that room was something remarkable. Now, there is the orderliness of a lady in the arrangement of her room, and the orderliness of a maid, and the two things, believe me, are widely different. A lady, who has no maid, and who has the gift of orderliness, will put things away when done with, and so leave her room a picture of neatness. I don't think, however, it would for a moment occur to her to pull things so as to be conveniently ready for her to use the next time she dresses in that room. This would be what a maid, accustomed to arrange a room for her mistress's use, would do mechanically. Miss Monroe's room was the neatness of a maid—not

⁷² Miller 57.

⁷³ Miller 57.

of a lady, and I was assured by Mrs. Hawke's maid that it was a neatness accomplished by her own hands. As I stood there, looking at that room, the whole conspiracy—if I may so call it—little by little pieced itself together, and became plain to me. Possibilities quickly grew into probabilities, and these probabilities once admitted, brought other suppositions in their train.” (150)

In this passage Loveday utilises her knowledge of social classes to solve the murder. She concludes that the “orderliness of that room” is indicative of a woman who was a maid, and not of a woman belonging to the upper class. Her careful observations aid her in deducing that Miss Monroe and Mary O’ Grady must have switched identities.

In addition to mental labour, Loveday engages in a particular kind of emotional labour, that resembles Clara’s acting in *The Nether World*: Loveday often solves crimes by exploiting emotional resources, and altering her appearance and personality. In “The Murder of Troyte’s Hill” Loveday disguises herself as an amanuensis so that she can go undetected while investigating the Craven household. Likewise, in “The Redhill Sisterhood” Mr. Dyer states that women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention” (67); subsequently, Loveday solves the crime by posing as a “nursery governess” (69). In “A Princess’s Vengeance,” rather than taking another domestic role, Loveday uses her “nondescript” (4) appearance to her advantage; she sits in “a quiet corner” (107), going undetected while she observes the people in the house. In “Drawn Daggers” Loveday “assume[s] the part of a lady house decorator in the employment of a West-end firm, and sent by them to survey [Mr. Hawke’s] house and advise upon its re-decoration” (137); and lastly, in “The Ghost of Fountain Lane,” Loveday poses as a lodger. Throughout these stories, Loveday is like a chameleon, assuming the appearance and role of various domestic persons to solve crimes.

In *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective*, Pirkis explores a new woman figure who labours in a non-traditional way. Despite having a paid profession, Loveday mentally and emotionally labours, and furthermore, “displays imaginative intelligence rooted in common sense.”⁷⁴ Although Loveday’s labours differ from those of Hadria and Beth, they do represent the new opportunities available to women at the close of the nineteenth century.

In this chapter, the affective labours of the arts (composing, writing, and orating) have been discussed. In addition, the mental labouring required in the profession of detecting has been analysed in an effort to illustrate the way women were taking hold of new opportunities. While Caird, Grand, and Pirkis are just a few of the New Woman writers, they do represent a comprehensive view of what they hoped to achieve through their work, and of what the movement stood for as a whole. Although Caird vehemently objected to marriage and motherhood in her literary career, she also believed in a “free marriage,” one where women can be independent and able to exercise their artistic agencies. *The Daughters of Danaus* not only reflects Caird’s ideas, but also displays women’s potential to achieve power and greatness through art. On the other hand, Grand’s career in social reform focused on giving women a well-rounded education. *The Beth Book* certainly addresses these concerns through Beth’s character; Beth achieves success as an orator and writer despite her limited education and oppressive marriage. Lastly, while Pirkis takes an altogether different approach and depicts the female detective, she does so in a revolutionary manner, before women even had the chance to labour in Scotland Yard. Although the plots in all three works differ, their intentions are the same: to demonstrate that women do have the ability of attaining autonomy despite societal constraints.

⁷⁴ Klein 71.

Chapter Five: Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* and May Sinclair's *The Creators*

What makes a novel important enough to impress itself upon both the discriminating few and the less discriminating many? ... The first thing is that the novel should seem to be true. It cannot seem true if the characters do not seem to be real. Style counts; plot counts; invention counts; originality counts; wide sympathy counts. But none of these counts anything like so much as the convincingness of the characters. If the characters are real then the novel will have a chance; if they are not oblivion will be its portion.¹

The excerpt from Arnold Bennett's 1923 essay "Is the Novel Decaying?" is part of a great literary debate of the early twentieth century: the Edwardian novel vs. the Modern novel, Bennett vs. Virginia Woolf. For Bennett, a novel's success is based largely on its ability to create believable characters. He expounds on his previous assertions by using Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories as an example of good fiction, and Woolf's *Jacob's Room* as one that fails in "character creating:"

I have seldom read a cleverer book than Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, a novel which has made a great stir in a small world. It is packed and bursting with originality, and it is exquisitely written. But the characters do not vitally survive in the mind because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness.²

Although direct, Bennett's attack on Woolf was not unprecedented. In 1919, Woolf published "Modern Novels," an essay in which she criticises the fiction of Edwardian authors such as Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy. While she addresses the shortcomings of all three authors, she takes special interest in Bennett's works. She writes:

¹ Arnold Bennett, "Is the Novel Decaying?" *The Register* [Australia] 25 Aug. 1923: 4.

² Bennett 4.

But Mr Bennett is the worst culprit of the three, inasmuch as he is by far the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in.... His characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it still remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for?³

Woolf continues her attack on the Edwardians in "Modern Fiction." Revising her previous essay, she adds, "If we fasten, then, one label on all these books, on which is one word materialists, we mean by it that they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring."⁴ Lastly, with "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," one of her best known essays, Woolf furthers her attack on the Edwardians and Bennett. Through the sketch of Mrs. Brown, Woolf criticises the way in which Edwardians focus more on the setting of their novels than on their characters:

[Edwardians] have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. And so they have developed a technique of novel writing which suits their purpose; they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But those tools are not our tools, and that business is not our business. For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death.⁵

In her literary career, Woolf was overtly conscious of class distinctions, often writing solely about the middle and upper classes. Thus, by describing the Edwardian themes as

³ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Novels," *The Times Literary Supplement* [London] 10 Apr. 1919: 189

⁴ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Vol. IV: 1925-1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984): 159.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," *The Hogarth Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924): 16.

“unimportant things,” it is clear that Woolf is largely disregarding the importance (upheld by realist authors) of describing the social and historical conditions of the working class.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that both Woolf’s and Bennet’s arguments have merit. While an interest in the debate between Bennett and Woolf may seem at some distance from my project, I find it necessary to contextualise my choice of works for the early twentieth century. The concept of affective labour essentially nullifies the debate about the relative virtues of Edwardian and Modernist novels, and allows us to view the representation of women’s labours—of the working and middle classes—as equally significant.

The late nineteenth century saw various social reforms, most a result of various feminist movements; for example,

Divorce law reform in 1857, the Married Women’s Property Acts in 1870 and 1882 ... the extension of elementary, secondary and university education to women from the 1870s ... the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886, and the widening of access to employment in shops, schools, offices, the civil service, and even the medical profession.⁶

In addition to these advances, the form of the novel also underwent many changes. Due to the radical themes of New Woman fiction, and the new social and professional opportunities for women, writers hesitated to build their works on Victorian values and Patmore’s angel in the house ideal. Instead, a new generation of writers focused on portraying a strong and independent Edwardian woman. These writers included Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling, and H.G. Wells. However, the realism of Edwardian fiction, relying largely on traditional modes of literary form and expression, was challenged by an emerging Modernist group of writers, including James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf. According to Jane Eldridge Miller,

⁶ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1999*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 2.

The breaks with tradition within Edwardian fiction, along with those in the new fiction of the 1890s, set the stage for more radical breaks of modernist fiction ... one can see Edwardian rebel women and their descendants rejecting the marriage plot, and striving to define themselves and their ambitions outside the limits imposed by gender norms. But one can also see dramatic ways in which [modernists] reject traditional novel content and traditional narrative forms, and strive to communicate the reality of their heroines' experiences through innovative representations of consciousness, sexuality and material reality.⁷

In this chapter I will focus on two very different texts that exemplify the Edwardian and Modernist traditions, and at the same time employ emerging feminist ideas and ideals: Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, and May Sinclair's *The Creators*. I will first examine the affective labours of Constance and Sophia Baines in *The Old Wives' Tale*, and subsequently explore the mental, imaginative, and emotional labours of Sinclair's "creators:" Jane Holland, Nina Lempriere, and Laura Gunning. Although these novels differ in setting and in plot, they are ultimately about the successes and failures of their characters. Furthermore, despite the aforementioned debate, I believe that both authors authentically portray their characters and their circumstances.

Due to Bennett's extensive literary career (spanning over thirty years and including over forty novels), scholarship is rather limited on *The Old Wives' Tale*, with preference given to his other more popular novels, such as *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *Riceman Steps* (1923). For *The Times Literary Supplement*, the novel is "a book one reads on and on with something of the intense

⁷ Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism, and the Edwardian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 123.

absorption with which one would read the autobiography of an old friend ... never fading in interest and reality,”⁸ and for the *Daily Mail*,

It is a piece of real life such as novelists seldom give us nowadays. Perhaps it is a little too true to life, for although there are memorable and even exciting incidents in the course of the story, the end is tame and a little disappointing—as it probably would be in real life, but should not be in a novel. Still we have thoroughly enjoyed tis excellent novel. It is by far the best that Mr. Bennett has yet written.⁹

According to *The North American Review*, “Both style and power of description match sincerity and truth in this novel and make it a real addition to the great tradition of the English novel.”¹⁰ Similarly, *The Dial* asserts “*The Old Wives’ Tale*, by Mr. Arnold Bennett, is nevertheless a remarkable work of fiction, a book of such sincerity, truthfulness, and insight as to make the ordinary novel seem hopelessly shallow and artificial by comparison.”¹¹

Today, scholarship continues to be limited; nevertheless, those who discuss the novel, praise Bennett’s characters and his ability to create a realist setting. For John Batchelor, the novel is successful due to Bennett’s “humble willingness to set out exhaustively the physical, economic and historical contexts in which his characters find themselves.”¹² Jason B. Jones furthers this idea and asserts that “even when social constraints are absent, Bennett touches on factors that nonetheless impede happiness or pleasure, and in so doing, dramatizes how some aspects of character can be grasped neither by appealing to social conditions or laws nor by asserting the self.”¹³ Lastly, for John Lucas, the novel “isn’t simply about Constance and Sophia; it is about a whole family, its successes and eventual failure and disappearance;

⁸ Walter de la Mare, “*The Old Wives’ Tale*,” *The Times Literary Supplement* [London] 12 Nov. 1908: 403.

⁹ “*The Old Wives’ Tale*,” *Daily Mail* [London] 7 Nov. 1908: 8.

¹⁰ “New Books Reviewed,” *The North American Review* 190.649 (1909): 837.

¹¹ William Morton Payne, “Recent Fiction,” *The Dial* [New York] 1 Oct. 1909: 236.

¹² John Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982) 179.

¹³ Jason B. Jones, “Revisiting “Mr. Bennett:” Pleasure, Aversion, and the Social in *The Old Wives’ Tale* and *Riceyman Steps*,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 46.1 (2003): 33.

and because the Baines family is in trade in Bursely, *The Old Wives' Tale* is also and inevitably about the Five Towns.”¹⁴ In addition to applauding Bennett’s ability to portray a realistic setting, scholars also discuss the novel’s protagonists. William Bellamy maintains that the novel is primarily focused on the life of Sophia; it is “an almost experimentalist study of a character who emigrates from her cultural environment and actively creates a new environment for herself elsewhere.”¹⁵ While most scholars appreciate the novel, others focus on its shortcomings, and the lack of realism.¹⁶ For example, Arnold Kettle points out that the novel’s weakness, “is that life itself is too closely identified with Sophia’s and Constance’s vision of life, so that when Sophia realizes that her life has been wasted we are invited not simply to experience human pity and indignation but to say ‘Ah, yes, Life’s like that altogether’—which it isn’t.”¹⁷ Even though the novel focuses on the lives of Constance and Sophia, the reader isn’t expected to readily accept their fates; in fact, Bennett encourages the reader to question their choices and achievements. By looking at *The Old Wives' Tale* through the lens of affective labour, a new interpretation of the novel becomes possible. Although at first glance the lives of Sophia and Constance seem different, it becomes clear that their affective labours of both are directed towards self-fulfilment: for Sophia, this means attaining financial independence and a successful business, and for Constance, it means fully embodying the role of wife and mother. Through my analysis, *The Old Wives' Tale* becomes a representation of the ideologies of two different centuries: the lasting Victorian feminine ideal (symbolised in Constance) and the twentieth-century independent woman (symbolised in Sophia).

¹⁴ John Lucas, *Arnold Bennett: A Study of His Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1974) 100.

¹⁵ William Bellamy, *The Novels of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, 1890-1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul PLC, 1971) 161.

¹⁶ See Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett; a Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974). Also see Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

¹⁷ Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*. vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1967) 89.

Bennett establishes the setting of the novel by describing the backdrop of the Five Towns:

They are unique and indispensable because you cannot drink tea out of a teacup without the aid of the Five Towns; because you cannot eat a meal in decency without the aid of the Five Towns. For this the architecture of the Five Towns is an architecture of ovens and chimneys; for this its atmosphere is as black as its mud; for this it burns and smokes all night, so that Longshaw has been compared to hell; for this it is unlearned in the ways of agriculture, never having seen corn except as packing straw and in quartern loaves; for this, on the other hand, it comprehends the mysterious habits of fire and pure, sterile earth; for this it lives crammed together in slippery streets where the housewife must change white window-curtains at least once a fortnight if she wishes to remain respectable; for this it gets up in the mass at six a.m., winter and summer, and goes to bed when the public-houses close; for this it exists—that you may drink tea out of a teacup and toy with a chop on a plate. All the everyday crockery used in the kingdom is made in the Five Towns—all, and much besides. A district capable of such gigantic manufacture, of such a perfect monopoly—and which finds energy also to produce coal and iron and great men—may be an insignificant stain on a county, considered geographically, but it is surely well justified in treating the county as its back garden once a week, and in blindly ignoring it the rest of the time.¹⁸

The language in this excerpt, “ovens and chimneys,” “atmosphere is as black as its mud,” “manufacture,” “monopoly,” and “coal and iron,” reinforces the industrial setting. The repetition of “for this,” and “of the Five Towns” further demonstrates the industrial

¹⁸ Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*, ed. John Wain (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 39. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

importance of the Five Towns; almost everything is manufactured here including toys, a “teacup,” and “everyday crockery.” In the heart of the towns lies the Square, “the centre of Bursley’s retail trade” (40), and the area where the Baines’ shop is located. By depicting the setting in detail Bennett is not only creating a realistic environment, but is also establishing the conditions of the inhabitants and their lives; he extends this rich description in the portrayal of his characters, especially his heroines Constance and Sophia.

Bennett introduces the reader to Sophia and Constance through a short but telling description. Rather than focus only on their physical appearances, he compares and contrasts their qualities throughout:

Constance's nose was snub, but agreeably so. Sophia had a fine Roman nose; she was a beautiful creature, beautiful and handsome at the same time. They were both of them rather like racehorses, quivering with delicate, sensitive, and luxuriant life; exquisite, enchanting proof of the circulation of the blood; innocent, artful, roguish, prim, gushing, ignorant, and miraculously wise.

Their ages were sixteen and fifteen; it is an epoch when, if one is frank, one must admit that one has nothing to learn: one has learnt simply everything in the previous six months. (42)

The words “delicate,” “luxuriant,” “exquisite,” and “enchanting” suggest elegance, and indicate that the sisters belong to a higher social class, possibly middle class. The simile used to create a comparison between the sisters and racehorses also illustrates their sophistication and grace: “They were both of them rather like racehorses, quivering with delicate, sensitive, and luxuriant life.” In addition, the assertion that they have learned “everything in the previous six months” suggests that they have been groomed for marriage and are at the age where they are seeking suitors. The similarities in characters end here; while Bennett continually comments on Sophia’s beauty, Constance is noted only for her “benevolence”

and “foolish good-nature” (44). These differences in appearance and temperament have a profound influence on their futures. Constance, who embodies the angel in the house, marries and has a traditional life. On the other hand, Sophia is seduced, deserted, and eventually attains financial independence by establishing her own business. I will first discuss the affective labours of Constance, and then address the affective labours of Sophia.

Constance’s domestic affective labour is apparent from the beginning:

She sat down and took from the bag a piece of loosely woven canvas, on which she was embroidering a bunch of roses in coloured wools. The canvas had once been stretched on a frame, but now, as the delicate labour of the petals and leaves was done, and nothing remained to do but the monotonous background, Constance was content to pin the stuff to her knee. With the long needle and several skeins of mustard-tinted wool, she bent over the canvas and resumed the filling-in of the tiny squares. The whole design was in squares—the gradations of red and greens, the curves of the smallest buds—all was contrived in squares, with a result that mimicked a fragment of uncompromising Axminster carpet. Still, the fine texture of the wool, the regular and rapid grace of those fingers moving incessantly at back and front of the canvas, the gentle sound of the wool as it passed through the holes, and the intent, youthful earnestness of that lowered gaze, excused and invested with charm an activity which, on artistic grounds, could not possibly be justified. The canvas was destined to adorn a gilt firescreen in the drawing-room, and also to form a birthday gift to Mrs. Baines from her elder daughter. But whether the enterprise was as secret from Mrs. Baines as Constance hoped, none save Mrs. Baines knew. (44-5)

The words “adorn,” “design,” “gilt,” as well as the roses she is stitching, suggest beauty; the fact that the canvas resembles an “Axminster carpet” also suggests vibrant and pretty colours. Although Constance’s labour is “delicate,” it still requires concentration and work to complete the piece in time. The tediousness of the needlework is illustrated by the “rapid grace of those fingers moving incessantly at back and front of the canvas.” This affective labour is clearly different from the industrial labour of the Five Towns and the useful objects that are being created (such as the crockery). Not only is the embroidery a gift for her mother, indicating that there will be no monetary compensation for her labour, but it is an “artistic,” piece, serving for beauty rather than usefulness.

Constance’s marriage to Samuel Povey further embeds her character within the realm of the Victorian ideal:

For him she was astoundingly feminine. She would put flowers on the mantelpiece, and then, hours afterwards, in the middle of a meal, ask him unexpectedly what he thought of her 'garden;' and he gradually divined that a perfunctory reply left her unsatisfied; she wanted a genuine opinion; a genuine opinion mattered to her. Fancy calling flowers on a mantelpiece a 'garden'!

How charming, how childlike! (197)

“Feminine,” “charming,” and “childlike,” are certainly reminiscent of the feminine Victorian ideal. The approval Constance seeks from her husband on various matters is also significant. Although she wants a “genuine opinion” on the flowers, it can be assumed that what she really needs from Samuel is verification that she is adequately performing her role as a wife. In fact, Bennett makes a point demonstrating Constance’s ability to complete all her domestic duties successfully: “Gradually she had gained skill and use in the management of her household and of her share of the shop” (195).

Despite Constance's domestic capabilities, one has to wonder whether or not she is content with her life thus far. Bennett satisfies our questions and concerns with the following passage:

Was Constance happy? Of course there was always something on her mind, something that had to be dealt with, either in the shop or in the house, something to employ all the skill and experience which she had acquired. Her life had much in it of laborious tedium—tedium never-ending and monotonous. (196)

This passage illustrates why Bennett has chosen Constance as the name of his protagonist; throughout the novel, Constance is constant and faithful in her roles as wife and mother. This passage also illustrates Constance's affective labour. While the vocabulary of the passage, "employ," "skill," and "laborious," suggests a kind of work, it goes unpaid; thus, Constance's domestic labour is in fact affective. Bennett's use of the word "tedium" to describe Constance's labour, also serves to illustrate Constance's boredom brought on by her monotonous and never-ending domestic labour. Nevertheless, Constance is "conscious of a vague contentment" (197), and displays no inclination in altering her position. According to Squillace, "Constance maintains herself in the only location allowed her since her exclusion from the shop upon her marriage: the fastness of her family. A woman who symbolically marries her father and substitutes her son for her husband has accepted changelessness as her icon."¹⁹ Therefore, Constance's conventional behaviour and conformity to the Victorian ideal is voluntary and purposeful.

There are two episodes where Constance contemplates her life and whether or not it is fulfilled; the first when Samuel dies, and the second when Constance herself is at her deathbed. When Samuel passes away, Constance reflects on her marriage:

¹⁹ Robert Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity, and Arnold Bennett* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1997) 63.

She did not nurse the idea that her life was at an end; on the contrary, she obstinately put it away from her, dwelling on Cyril. She did not indulge in the enervating voluptuousness of grief. She had begun in the first hours of bereavement by picturing herself as one marked out for the blows of fate. She had lost her father and her mother, and now her husband. Her career seemed to be punctuated by interments. But after a while her gentle commonsense came to insist that most human beings lose their parents, and that every marriage must end in either a widower or a widow, and that all careers are punctuated by interments. Had she not had nearly twenty-one years of happy married life? (Twenty-one years—rolled up! The sudden thought of their naive ignorance of life, hers and his, when they were first married, brought tears into her eyes. How wise and experienced she was now!) And had she not Cyril? Compared to many women, she was indeed very fortunate. (277)

It is interesting that Bennett chooses the term “career” to describe Constance’s role, as the term usually refers to “a course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progress or advancement in the world.”²⁰ However, *The Oxford English Dictionary* also defines “career” as “a person’s course or progress through life.” According to this connotation, Constance’s career of marriage and motherhood certainly qualifies. In fact, through the lens of affective labour, it becomes evident that Constance’s housework and childcare have been labours of her chosen career. When Samuel dies, Constance has no-one else to dote on but her son; a son who continuously rejects her influence and affections. Yet, she has no choice but to hold on to Victorian roles and conventions; without her domestic role, Constance’s life is futile. As Jones asserts, “Constance’s primary failing is clinging

²⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

desperately to the structures and ideals of the Victorian age even as her husband and son illustrate the waning of that era.”²¹

As the novel comes to a close, Constance once again reflects on her life and her choices. This time, however, she compares her accomplishments to Sophia’s:

In spite of the fact that Sophia was dead she still pitied Sophia as a woman whose life had been wasted. This idea of Sophia's wasted and sterile life, and of the far-reaching importance of adhering to principles, recurred to her again and again.... Constance never pitied herself. She did not consider that Fate had treated her very badly. She was not very discontented with herself ... She had many dissatisfactions. But she rose superior to them. When she surveyed her life, and life in general, she would think, with a sort of tart but not sour cheerfulness: “Well, that is what life is!” (612-3)

Constance’s judgmental attitude towards Sophia’s life choices is evident. Constance pities Sophia for not choosing marriage and motherhood. The repetition of “wasted” demonstrates how strongly Constance believes Sophia’s life has been futile. By comparing her life to Sophia’s, Constance is justifying the importance of her domestic career; she is in a “superior” position because she has embodied the Victorian feminine ideal. Lucas asserts that Bennett depicts Constance as “the sister who perhaps achieves more.”²² I have to disagree with that statement; if Bennett wanted the reader to believe Constance is the stronger heroine, than he would have focused more on her life. As it stands, Book Three, which details Sophia’s life, is much longer than Book Two, which describes Constance’s. This suggests that Sophia is the more important character, and in turn, Bennett’s preferred heroine. This will be further discussed when exploring Sophia’s life.

²¹ Jones 38.

²² Lucas 111.

Bennett's representation of Sophia is vastly different from that of Constance. While Bennett portrays Constance as the Victorian feminine ideal, his portrayal of Sophia resembles that of the New Woman. Bennett furthers this contrast even in their physical descriptions: "Constance's hands had taken on the coarse texture which comes from commerce with needles, pins, artificial flowers, and stuffs, Sophia's fine hands were seldom innocent of ink" (101). Constance may be content with needlework, the shop, and other traditional domestic recreations, but Sophia envisions a career as a schoolteacher. As expected, Mrs. Baines views this path as unacceptable:

Why in the name of heaven had the girl taken such a notion into her head? Orphans, widows, and spinsters of a certain age suddenly thrown on the world—these were the women who, naturally, became teachers, because they had to become something. But that the daughter of comfortable parents, surrounded by love and the pleasures of an excellent home, should wish to teach in a school was beyond the horizons of Mrs. Baines's common sense. Comfortable parents of to-day who have a difficulty in sympathizing with Mrs. Baines, should picture what their feelings would be if their Sophias showed a rude desire to adopt the vocation of chauffeur. (73)

The words "became" and "to become" suggest one's vocation or how one's life is to develop. Mrs. Baines hopes that both her children will marry and possibly tend to the shop; for this reason she views Sophia's wish to become a "school-teacher" (73) as an insult to her social class and upbringing. Mrs. Baines clearly represents the Victorian attitudes towards women who want to transcend their given "horizons." Unable to pursue a career in teaching, Sophia seeks another way to escape the shop and her expected future; her beauty gives her this opportunity.

Sophia may lack femininity and poise, yet, her beauty more than compensates.

Bennett writes: “Sophia’s attitude was really very trying; her manners deserved correction.... [Mrs. Baines] had come to regard them as somehow the inevitable accompaniment of Sophia’s beauty, as the penalty of that surpassing charm which occasionally emanated from the girl like a radiance” (73). Moreover, “Sophia was splendidly beautiful. And even her mother and Constance had an instinctive idea that that face was, at any rate, a partial excuse for her asperity” (101). Although the reader is told that Sophia is beautiful from the outset, it is only when she meets Gerald Scales that Bennett fully describes her appeal:

As she sat in her sister’s chair in the corner, entrenched behind the perpendicular boxes, playing nervously with the scissors, her beautiful face was transfigured into the ravishingly angelic. It would have been impossible for Mr. Gerald Scales, or anybody else, to credit, as he gazed at those lovely, sensitive, vivacious, responsive features, that Sophia was not a character of heavenly sweetness and perfection. She did not know what she was doing; she was nothing but the exquisite expression of a deep instinct to attract and charm. Her soul itself emanated from her in an atmosphere of allurements and acquiescence. Could those laughing lips hang in a heavy pout? Could that delicate and mild voice be harsh? Could those burning eyes be coldly inimical? Never! The idea was inconceivable! And Mr. Gerald Scales, with his head over the top of the boxes, yielded to the spell. (107)

By using the words “angelic,” “heavenly,” “perfection,” and “acquiescence,” Bennett suggests that Sophia’s perceived appearance and personality embody the Victorian notion of femininity. Furthermore, the rhetorical questions serve to assert implicitly Sophia’s beauty and submissive nature. However, as with Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley, Sophia’s beauty hides her determined nature. Although it seems that Sophia “did not know what she

was doing,” the reader discovers that she not only knows what her beauty can accomplish, but uses it to escape the constraints of her family, and of course, the shop. According to Squillace, “Sophia is perfectly aware of her beauty ... and marvels at the apparent advantages it lends her in courtship with Gerald.”²³ This is evident in the narrator’s remark: “‘After all’ her heart said, ‘I must be very beautiful, for I have attracted the pearl of men!’ And she remembered her face in the glass. The value and the power of beauty were tremendously proved to her” (138). Having already discussed the value of beauty in the marriage market in previous chapters, Sophia’s physical appearance is indeed what attracts Gerald. Despite her innate advantage, Sophia is mistaken in thinking that it alone can guarantee success. As Squillace asserts, “what she most ardently, though only half-consciously, desires her beauty to win her is power and freedom.”²⁴ While her beauty does give her the means to marry and escape the constraints of her home, the power and freedom she ultimately attains is due to her affective labour, not her physical appearance.

As with Hadria in *The Daughters of Danaus*, Sophia’s marriage reinforces her dependency and limits her freedom even more so than before. For the first time in the novel, Sophia appears “pitiably young, virgin, raw, unsophisticated; helpless in the midst of dreadful dangers” (315). Despite her marital confinement, and alcoholic, philandering husband, Sophia finds a way to secure her future through mental affective labour. In need of capital to secure her freedom, Sophia carefully steals money from Gerald while he is in a drunken stupor:

Sticking out of the breast-pocket of his soiled coat was the packet which he had received on the previous day. If he had not already lost it, he could only thank his luck. She took it. There were English bank-notes in it for two hundred pounds, a letter from a banker, and other papers.... She finished

²³ Squillace 70.

²⁴ Squillace 70.

dressings, and then sewed the notes into the lining of her skirt. She had no silly, delicate notions about stealing. She obscurely felt that, in the care of a man like Gerald, she might find herself in the most monstrous, the most impossible dilemmas. Those notes, safe and secret in her skirt, gave her confidence, reassured her against the perils of the future, and endowed her with independence. The act was characteristic of her enterprise and of her fundamental prudence. It approached the heroic. And her conscience hotly defended its righteousness. (357)

Through this passage Bennett is questioning morality and conventional values; by describing Sophia's act of stealing as "fundamental prudence," and even a "heroic" act, he is challenging the reader, eliciting sympathy rather than judgement. Bennett's use of the word "enterprise" is also revealing. The word refers to "a piece of work taken in hand, an undertaking; chiefly, and now exclusively, a bold, arduous, or momentous undertaking," and also, "disposition or readiness to engage in undertakings of difficulty, risk, or danger."²⁵ It is clear that Bennett is using the word in this episode to describe Sophia's plan to attain independence and escape her oppressive marriage.

With Gerald's desertion, and Madame Foucault's elopement, Sophia finally has the opportunity to do something on her own. As such, she becomes the proprietor of the lodging house:

With a flat full of furniture she considered that she ought to be able to devise a livelihood; the enterprise of becoming independent was already indeed begun. She ardently wished to be independent, to utilize in her own behalf the gifts of organization, foresight, commonsense and tenacity which she knew she possessed and which had lain idle. And she hated the idea of flight. (419)

²⁵ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

Bennett's repetition of the word "independent" illustrates its importance. By utilizing her mind, Sophia is labouring affectively; her "organization, foresight, commonsense" engage her mental capacity and are aimed at achieving financial autonomy. Bennett is also illustrating Sophia's courage and business-like manner. Sophia's determination and drive to create a successful venture are so strong that her mental labour consumes her: "She thought of nothing but her enterprise, which absorbed all her powers" (421). Again Bennett uses the word "enterprise," although this time it has dual meaning; her venture in attaining financial stability, and her business, the lodging house. Nevertheless, the pressing need to make money and secure her finances proves to be physically tiring:

And she went up to her room every night with limbs exhausted, but with head clear enough to balance her accounts and go through her money. She did this in bed with thick gloves on. If often she did not sleep well, it was not because of the distant guns, but because of her preoccupation with the subject of finance. She was making money, and she wanted to make more. She was always inventing ways of economy. She was so anxious to achieve independence that money was always in her mind. She began to love gold, to love hoarding it, and to hate paying it away. (423)

The vocabulary in this passage, "money," "finance," "economy," and "gold," illustrates Sophia's competence in all financial and economic matters. Aware that financial security is the only means of independence, Sophia does everything in her power to make, save, and manage the money she is earning. Her physical exhaustion can thus be viewed as a side effect of her continuous mental labouring. Nonetheless, she emerges as a successful business owner with an extensive fortune: "At the end of 1878, the Exhibition Year, her Pension consisted of two floors instead of one, and she had turned the two hundred pounds stolen from Gerald into over two thousand" (457). By relating the Exhibition Year to Sophia's year of financial

success, Bennett is linking the nation's progress to her more personal one; despite stealing Gerald's money, she appears to be congratulated for all she has achieved.

Although Sophia has made notable accomplishments, Constance still morally and religiously judges her choices:

What a career! A brief passion, and then nearly thirty years in a boarding-house! And Sophia had never had a child; had never known either the joy or the pain of maternity.... And she had ended—thus! This was the piteous, ignominious end of Sophia's wondrous gifts of body and soul. Hers had not been a life at all. And the reason? It is strange how fate persists in justifying the harsh generalizations of Puritan morals, of the morals in which Constance had been brought up by her stern parents! Sophia had sinned. It was therefore inevitable that she should suffer. An adventure such as she had in wicked and capricious pride undertaken with Gerald Scales, could not conclude otherwise than it had concluded. It could have brought nothing but evil. There was no getting away from these verities, thought Constance. And she was to be excused for thinking that all modern progress and cleverness was as naught, and that the world would be forced to return upon its steps and start again in the path which it had left. (585)

Bennett chooses to write this passage through Constance's perspective, to elicit the reader's judgement. Again he uses the term "career" to describe Sophia's life. Although her sister has created a fortune, Constance disapproves of Sophia and her unconventional path. In Constance's eyes, Sophia is a "fallen woman," and nothing can ever rectify her position. It is evident that Bennett is criticizing the lasting influence of Victorian morals and social codes; despite the advantages and the opportunities of the twentieth century, women were still faced with various kinds of oppression. According to Squillace, "by assimilating Constance to a

lost Victorian age, Bennett pursues the general strategy of *The Old Wives' Tale*: to claim progress toward personal autonomy as the soul of Edwardianism by continuously identifying the modern with the anti-authoritarian and the patriarchal with the past.”²⁶ Bellamy shares a similar observation:

The strange disconformity between the two sisters when they meet again at the end of the novel derives from the contrast between the culture-immersed unconscious mode of Constance and the Sophian mode of “self-discovered” consciousness. One sister has gone beyond the limited state in which they are depicted at the beginning of the novel, and the other has represented the “historical continuation” of it.²⁷

Bennett is skilful in enabling two different positions towards his protagonists: conservative and liberal readers both have the ability to sympathise with either Constance or Sophia. Bennett is criticizing the lasting Victorian tradition through Constance, and exploring the strides women can make when overcoming oppression through Sophia. However, Sophia’s successful business and independence come with a considerable cost; and despite Constance’s adherence to Victorian morals and standards, she is left to lead a solitary, monotonous life. Although it is difficult to discern whether or not Bennett’s intention was to identify with Sophia or Constance, by using affective labour as a tool to analyse the characters, we as readers can appreciate the importance and complexity of their labours within the narrative. Therefore, while for Constance and Sophia self-fulfilment may mean different things, they both are able to achieve these things through affective labour.

Another novel that explores the new opportunities that arose with the start of the twentieth century is May Sinclair’s *The Creators: A Comedy*. Through this novel Sinclair

²⁶ Robert Squillace, “Self-Isolation and Self-Advertisement in *The Old Wives' Tale*,” *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature*, eds. Carola M. Kaplan, and Anne B. Simpson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) 95.

²⁷ Bellamy 162.

questions whether or not women can have both their own career and a place in the home (as wife, or mother, or both). Although May Sinclair wrote over twenty novels and had a literary career that spanned thirty years, she was a marginal figure in Edwardian and Modernist literature. A feminist, and a member of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, her works reflected her beliefs, exploring "women's struggles with their sexual desires, the demands of creativity, and the friction of family relationships."²⁸ Her novel *The Creators: A Comedy*, published in 1910, presents the lives of two protagonists, the famous Jane Holland and her friend George Tanqueray, as well as the main characters, Nina Lempriere and Laura Gunning (both writers), and Owen Prothero (a poet). Although all the authors try to exercise their literary genius and creativity through their writing, it is the women who have to sacrifice their domestic and familial obligations to achieve success in the literary marketplace. In addition to exploring the ways in which creative "genius" affects these characters, Sinclair also addresses romance and marriage, like many New Woman novels did previously. Nina, Laura, Jane, George and Owen have relationships of their own, yet the women are the ones who suffer when trying to balance their careers with marriage and motherhood.

The novel was "serialized in *Century Magazine* between November 1909 and October 1910 under the editorship of Richard Gilder, and was subsequently published in volume form in both Britain and the USA."²⁹ Unlike *The Divine Fire* (1904), which achieved success in Britain and the USA and made Sinclair a best-selling author, *The Creators* received less literary notice. According to the *Times Literary Supplement*,

It is ... rather disquieting to find nearly all Miss Sinclair's chief characters in *The Creators* not only eloquently idolizing one another's 'genius,' but each candidly, almost pathologically, discussing and unravelling his or her own....

²⁸ Suzanne Raitt, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 2.

²⁹ Raitt 122.

Yet we may suspect at times that there must be something a little priggish in the ultra-subtle talk and self-absorption of these creators.”³⁰

For *The San Francisco Call*, the novel “is a strong story of literary London and the characters are as real as flesh and blood can make them.... The book is decidedly the biggest and most important work from Miss Sinclair’s pen, but it is to be questioned if the great public will be as interested in the tale as in its predecessors.”³¹ Similarly, although the *New-York Tribune* criticises aspects of the novel, it concludes the review with “No serious importance must be attached to a novelist’s treatment of a problem that belongs to the domain of science, least of all when it comes to the relation of woman’s genius to eugenics, but Miss Sinclair has written an interesting, if not remarkable, book on a subject that has been ‘in the air’ for some time past.”³²

Due to the novel’s initial unpopularity, *The Creators* has been undervalued and ignored. Although scholarship is extremely limited, recent critics who have written about the novel view it favourably. According to Michele K. Troy, *The Creators* “voiced Sinclair’s frustrations with the power of the publishing world and the press to build up and tear down literary careers. The novel takes pains to detail the pressures of the market on three female and three male authors.”³³ Miller asserts, Sinclair “turns to the themes of sexuality and marriage, but for the first time her psychological focus allows her to scrutinize gender roles and examine the ways in which gender determines one’s sense of self.”³⁴ Suzanne Raitt comments on Sinclair’s portrayal of female writers: “*The Creators* makes it clear that domestic, maternal, and sexual responsibilities make it very difficult—even impossible—for

³⁰ Walter de la Mare, “*The Creators*,” *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 29 Sept. 1910: 350.

³¹ “Book Page of the Sunday Call,” *The San Francisco Call* [California] 6 Nov. 1910: 15.

³² “Literary Notes and Criticism,” *New-York Tribune* [New York] 18 Dec. 1910: 6.

³³ Michele K. Troy, “May Sinclair’s *The Creators*: High-Cultural Celebrity and a Failed Comedy,” *English Literature in Translation, 1880-1920* 47.1 (2004): 51.

³⁴ Miller 189.

women writers to produce their best work.”³⁵ It is through *The Creators* that Sinclair questions whether or not women can have successful careers while fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. Although the affective labours of Jane, Laura, and Nina are similar, each character represents the different options available when trying to further their writing careers. As such, each character has a different outcome: Nina sacrifices love to focus all her energy into her writing, while Laura writes endlessly to support her father, and later her husband, Owen. Jane is a more complex character in that she continually struggles to meet the demands of her career and those of her family and husband. Although she initially puts her career on hold and instead focuses on her domestic roles, the suppression of her genius results in depression. And yet, when she finally has the strength to express her creative power through another novel, it results in the death of her child, the disintegration of her marriage, and it culminates with the rumoured affair with George. Although *The Creators* demonstrates the difficulties women face when trying to balance their careers with their families, by focusing on the artistic labours of these three female characters, a new analysis of the text is possible; the mental, emotional and creative labours of the characters are imperative to their self-fulfilment and financial autonomy.

Through *The Creators*, Sinclair stresses the importance of artistic creativity. While all the “creators” seek to publish their works for financial reasons, their driving force is not money, but rather an innate need of expression. Yet, obligations continuously disrupt their writing processes, especially for the female characters who struggle to balance their careers with domestic and social demands. I will first begin by discussing the affective labours of Nina, Laura, and Jane, and then move on to address the conflict Jane faces when trying to maintain her career while being married.

The crux of *The Creators* is revealed quite early in the text, through Nina’s speech:

³⁵ Raft 123.

“Doesn't it look, Jinny, as if genius were the biggest curse a woman can be saddled with? It's giving you another sex inside you, and a stronger one, to plague you. When we want a thing we can't sit still like a woman and wait till it comes to us, or doesn't come. We go after it like a man; and if we can't get it peaceably we fight for it, as a man fights when he isn't a coward or a fool. And because we fight we're done for. And then, when we're down, the woman in us turns and rends us.”³⁶

Nina states that “genius [is] the biggest curse a woman can be saddled with,” addressing the difficulties women face when cultivating their creativity, or “self-fulfilment” (as Caird asserts in *The Daughters of Danaus*). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “genius” as a “native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art; instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery,” and/or “a person endowed with ‘genius.’”³⁷ According to these definitions, Sinclair’s use of the word “genius” serves to denote the skill, and intellectual and creative power the characters encompass. Yet this quality is often detrimental, at least to the female characters.

While “genius” is what defines Nina, Laura and Jane as writers, it is also what obstructs them from embodying the proper feminine. All three experience a powerful drive to express their creativity, which creates a conflict when faced with the roles they are expected to fulfil as women. Nina, Laura, and Jane all face difficulties when trying to express their genius because they try so desperately to meet all social obligations. Nevertheless, they all manage their careers differently; while Nina chooses celibacy and isolation to produce works of fiction, Laura and Jane struggle to balance their domestic roles with their careers.

³⁶ May Sinclair, *The Creators: A Comedy* (New York: Century Co., 1910) 105. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

Nina most fully represents the New Woman attitude. She rejects marriage and romance so that she can concentrate on her career, and even seeks isolation to focus more on her work. Although she publishes her first work, "Tales of the Marches," early on, it is with her second work that the reader is able to understand her creative power:

It appeared, Nina's book, in these hours that tingled with expectation of the terrible Event. In a majestic silence and secrecy it appeared. Jane had heard Tanqueray praise it. "Thank heaven," he said, "there's one of us that's sinless. Nina's genius can lay nothing to her charge." She saw it. Nina's flame was pure. Her hand had virginal strength.

It had not always had it. Her younger work, "Tales of the Marches," showed violence and torture in its strength. It was as if Nina had torn her genius from the fire that destroyed it and had compelled it to create. Her very style moved with the vehemence of her revolt from Tanqueray. But there had been a year between Tanqueray and Owen Prothero. For one year Nina had been immune from the divine folly. And in that year she had produced her sinless masterpiece. No wonder that the Master praised her.

And above the praise Jane heard Nina's voice proclaiming yet again that the law and the condition was virginity, untamed and untamable virginity. And for her, also, was it not the law? (286-7)

The repetition of "virginity" indicates how significant Nina's isolation and rejection of romance is to her success. Her "virginal strength" certainly gives her the power to avoid "divine folly," presumably romance, in order to consume herself with affective labour. Thus, her work is considered "sinless," because it is not tainted by love and romantic disappointment.

Nina's works are envied by Jane who struggles to write due to her domestic responsibilities. She too longs to be like Nina, "stripped for the race, carrying nothing but her genius" (376). Sinclair continues to illustrate Jane's envy of Nina's solitary life:

The beauty and the wonder of it—in Nina—was its purity. Nina showed to what a pitch it had brought her, the high, undivided passion of her genius. Under it every trace of Nina's murkiness had vanished. She had lost that look of restless, haggard adolescence, that horrible intentness, as if her hand was always on the throat of her wild beast. You saw, of course, that she had suffered; but you saw too that her genius was appeased by her suffering. It was just, it was compassionate; it had rewarded her for every pang.

Jane found herself saying beautiful things about Nina's genius. It was the flame, unmistakably the pure flame. If solitude, if virginity, if frustration could do that—She knew what it had cost Nina, but it was worth it, seeing what she had gained. (451-2)

Nina's genius is "pure," because she doesn't have to share it with any other obligations; her "undivided passion" is fully expressed through her work. Although she has suffered by isolating herself, the end result is well worth her struggle. Her genius is compared to a "pure flame," indicating that it is "free from admixture of anything debasing or deteriorating; unadulterated, uncorrupted, uncontaminated; sexually undefiled,"³⁸ and burning bright. For Sinclair, Nina represents the woman who maintains her professional career through "solitude [and] virginity."

Sinclair introduces the reader to Laura by first describing her physical appearance and personality:

³⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

Little Laura, holding herself very straight, greeted him with her funny smile, a smile that was hardly more than a tremor of her white lips. Laura Gunning, at twenty-seven, had still in some of her moods the manner of a child. She was now like a seven-year-old made shy and serious by profound excitement. She was a very small woman and she had a small face, with diminutive features in excessively low relief, a face shadowless as a child's. Everything about Laura Gunning was small and finished with an innocent perfection. She had a small and charming talent for short stories, little novels, perfect within the limits of their kind. (57)

Her child-like appearance, innocence, and “small” build and features certainly resemble those of the Victorian feminine ideal; her nickname, “Kiddy” (114), furthers this similarity.

However, Laura’s creative genius and motivation to write differentiate her from the angel in the house. Despite her career, she is hindered from achieving autonomy because she has to care for her ailing father. Unable to work uninterrupted while her father is awake, she waits for the few hours when he is asleep to proceed with her work: “She was writing, snatching at the few golden moments of her day, while apart from and unaware of her, sunken in his seat, the old man dozed by the fireside. From time to time she glanced at him, and then her face set under its tenderness, as if it fronted, unflinching, an immovable, perpetual fear” (204). The phrase “golden moment of her day” illustrates the pleasure Laura experiences when she is able to write, albeit for only a small period of time, uninterrupted. The “immovable, perpetual fear” she faces is the inevitable disruption to her writing process when her father wakes. It is clear that Laura’s domestic responsibilities strain her mentally and physically, and hinder her from producing works at the same level of achievement as Nina and Jane.

The reader is able to see the extent of Laura’s exhaustion when Nina visits her:

[Nina] was shocked by the change she found in her little friend. The Kiddy was very thin. Her pretty, slender neck was wasted, and her childlike wrists were flattened to the bone. A sallow tint was staining her whiteness. Her hair no longer waved in its low curves; it fell flat and limp from the parting. Her eyes, strained, fixed in their fear, showed a rim of white. Her mouth was set tight in defiance of her fear. Nina noticed that there was a faint, sagging mark on either side of it.

“Kiddy,” she said, “how *will* you——?”

“I don't know. My brain's all woolly and it won't think.” (304-5)

Nina's mental affective labour and domestic labour are taking a toll on her mind and body. Her emaciated and pale figure sharply contrasts with the physical description Sinclair gives of Laura initially; her “funny smile” (57) changes to a “mouth set tight,” and her “shadowless face” (57) is now overtaken by her “sallow tint.” In addition to these physical changes, her mental deterioration is also apparent: she is confused and unable to think clearly.

Following her father's death, Laura is finally free of the domestic demands that obstructed her career. Although her marriage to Owen suggests a decline back into a domestic role, she is actually victorious; her career blossoms and she is finally able to write and make enough money to support herself and him through her publications.

The size of Laura's income...was excessively absurd. Large and comfortable as it appeared to Prothero, it was not yet so large nor was it so comfortable that Laura could lie back and rest on it. She was heartrending, irritating, maddening to Prothero in her refusals to lie back on it and rest. She toiled prodigiously, incessantly, indefatigably. She implored Prothero to admit that if she was prodigious and incessant, she *was* indefatigable, she never tired. There was nothing wonderful in what she did. She had caught the silly trick of it. It

could be done, she assured him, standing on your head. She enjoyed doing it.

The wonderful thing was that she should be paid for her enjoyment, instead of having to pay for it, like other people. (423)

Here, her mental affective labour is described as “toil,” indicating that she is labouring extremely hard in creating her works. The words “prodigious,” “incessant,” and “indefatigable,” describe the degree to which she persists in her writing. Despite Laura’s labour, the reader is assured of her “enjoyment” in expressing her creativity and exercising her genius; the money she receives for her writing is also an important factor in her contention. By the end, Laura is able to find a happy medium between her roles of wife and successful author. Jane, on the other hand, is not as fortunate.

Sinclair establishes Jane’s genius and artistic power at the outset:

“She’s too damnably clever,” [George] kept saying to himself, “too damnably clever.” And he took up her last book just to see again how damnably clever she was....

What a genius she had, what a burning, flashing, laughing genius. It matched his own; it rose to it, giving him flame for flame. Almost as clear-eyed it was, and tenderer hearted. (18)

Jane’s cleverness is directly correlated with her creative genius, a genius described as “burning, flashing, laughing.” The adjectives here suggest an intense, passionate, innate power that is expressed through affective labour. Despite her blossoming career, Jane finds herself stifled by all the obligations that arise due to her fame:

[Jane] smiled and shook her head.... “I have to work like ten horses, and when I think I’ve got a spare minute, just to rest in, some one takes it. Look there. And there. And there.”

[George's] eyes followed her wild gesture. Innumerable little notes were stacked on Jinny's writing-table and lay littered among her manuscripts.

Invitation cards, theatre tickets, telegrams were posted in every available space about the room, schedules of the tax the world levies on celebrity. (119)

Plagued by numerous social obligations, "invitation cards, theatre tickets, telegrams," Jane is unable to concentrate on her work. Although she is thankful of the advantages her celebrity status has to offer, "the world['s]" demands on her are "tax[ing]." The burning of the notes, a step she is unable to take and thus has George complete it for her, symbolizes her (brief) freedom from society's demands and expectations; she is now able to focus all her energy into exercising her creativity. Nonetheless, Jane's freedom is taken away when she enters in a marriage with editor, Hugh Brodrick. Through marriage—Jane to Brodrick and George to Rose—Sinclair addresses the "inequities of the institution of marriage, as well as [scrutinises] the inadequacies of gender norms."³⁹ When George marries Rose, he works undisturbed while his wife manages the household. Jane mistakenly thinks she too can balance her career with her marriage in the same way. However, it is soon revealed that Brodrick expects her to manage the household, take over Gertrude's domestic duties, and give up her career when she has children.

Although Jane does write and publish a novel in the first few months of her marriage, it is not a product of her genius, but rather, a project completed for Brodrick:

According to her code and Tanqueray's she had sinned a mortal sin. She had conceived and brought forth a book, not by divine compulsion, but because Brodrick wanted a book and she wanted to please Brodrick. Such a desire was the mother of monstrous and unshapen things. In Tanqueray's eyes it was hardly less impure than the commercial taint. Its uncleanness lacked the

³⁹ Miller 191.

element of venality; that was all that could be said. She had done violence to her genius. She had constrained the secret and incorruptible will. (287)

The words “divine compulsion,” “impure,” and “uncleanness,” relate back to the idea that genius must be “pure” to express creative ideas authentically. Jane no longer feels pleasure in writing, because she doesn’t have the freedom to express herself authentically. Disappointed in herself and embarrassed by the work she has produced, she decides to ignore her genius, give up writing, and instead, try to fulfil her motherly duties; yet she quickly realizes that her submission is consuming her identity:

All that week, and for many weeks, she busied herself with the child and with the house. It was as if she were trying, passionately, to make up for some brief disloyalty, some lapse of tenderness.

Then, all of a sudden she flagged; she was overcome by an intolerable fatigue and depression. (329)

The suppression of her genius and creative power certainly contribute to her breakdown. In the same way that Laura falls to exhaustion because of her inability to write undisturbed, Jane is “overcome by fatigue and depression” when her self-fulfilment is hindered. Aware that if she continues in this way she will lose herself entirely, she begins a new novel (against Brodrick’s wishes), hoping to find the time and strength to balance all of her duties: “There was her novel; and there was Brodrick, and the baby, and Brodrick's family, and her own friends. She couldn't drop one of them” (342).

As Jane desperately tries to re-establish her career, her efforts are once again thwarted, this time by Dr Henry Brodrick:

“This is not advice I should give you,” [the doctor] went on, addressing her silence, “if you were an unmarried woman. I urge my unmarried patients to

work—to use their brains all they can—and married ones, too, when they've no children.... But in your case it's disastrous.”

Jane remained silent. She herself had a premonition of disaster. Her restlessness was on her. Her nerves and blood were troubled again by the ungovernable, tyrannous impulse of her power. It was not the year she should have chosen, but because she had no choice she was working through everything, secretly, in defiance of Henry's orders. She wondered if he knew. He was looking at her keenly, as if he had at any rate a shrewd suspicion.

(398-9)

Dr Brodrick is attempting to oppress Jane's independence by convincing her that a career for a woman is only plausible when children aren't present. And yet, the passage illustrates just how difficult it is for Jane to abandon her literary career and her genius, in an effort to appease her family. The words “ungovernable” and “tyrannous” suggest her need for expression is uncontrollable; and even though she is aware that she is in a difficult position, she has no desire to abandon her novel, even if it means working on it against her family's wishes. As I have shown in the chapter on *Lady Audley's Secret*, when women deviated from the proper feminine, they were likely to be deemed insane. Jane's desire to deviate from the traditional roles of wife and mother and instead focus her energy in expressing her masculine genius, propels Dr. Brodrick to explain her actions as “proof of insanity” (400). The subsequent death of her child allows Broderick and her brother-in-law to justify their assumptions, and attribute the death to her selfish desire to write.

Despite surrendering to the feminine ideal, her genius continues to demand its expression. Again Jane decides to express her creative power, this time following Nina's example and seeking isolation and distance from her family to do so. She affectively labours in isolation, and produces her work:

She stayed, and in her fifth week she received the reward of her staying.

Walking back to the farm late one evening, the moors veiled from her passion by the half-darkness, her Idea came back to her. It came, not yet with the vividness of flesh and blood, but like a ghost. It had ghostly hands and feet, and like a ghost it walked the road with her. But through its presence she felt in herself again that nascent ecstasy which foretold, infallibly, the onset of the incredible act and labour of creation....

Under the ash-trees her Idea showed in its immense and luminous perfection.

It trembled into life. It drew her, palpitating, into the lamp-light of the room.

(459-60)

Through affective labouring, and the use of her creative and mental faculties, an “Idea” for her novel is produced. It is important to note that the capitalization of “Idea” demonstrates its significance; Jane’s ability to express her genius freely marks a pivotal point in the novel. Jane’s joy in finally producing an authentic idea through her mental process also aids her personal development; the “immense and luminous perfection” resembles Nina’s “pure flame” (452) discussed previously, illustrating how important it is for genius to be expressed on its own. Furthermore, the vocabulary of this passage, “ghostly,” “trembled,” and “palpitating,” suggests her genius is of another world, one that is unbound by societal constraints and womanly duties.

Upon finishing her novel, Jane learns that she is being accused of having an affair with George. Yet, when she returns home to salvage her marriage, she is confronted with the affair her husband and Gertrude have been having. The ending of *The Creators* proves to be elusive; the reader is forced to make their own assertions as to whether or not Jane has published her novel, if she and Broderick have reconciled, and if she is happy. According to Miller,

[Sinclair] strove to portray realistically the difficulties that arise when women try to redefine themselves and their role in society, and in doing so she focused upon issues which were of the greatest concern to Edwardian feminists, but were ignored by the majority of Edwardian novelists—children, household management, and the conflict between work and marriage. Sinclair saw that there were no easy answers to these problems; thus she offered no satisfying closure.”⁴⁰

Although Jane’s destiny is ambiguous, Nina and Laura find ways to maintain their careers and continuously express their genius. Their affective labour provides them with financial autonomy, and solidifies their careers. Even though they do receive compensation and fame, their mental and creative capabilities allow them to labour and produce works; thus, affective labour is still necessary for their independence, and a useful lens with which to analyse works of fiction.

Bennett’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* and Sinclair’s *The Creators* both represent the new opportunities available for women at the turn of the century. In the earlier works discussed in this thesis—for instance, *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, and even Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*—the protagonists seek marriage as an advancement to their positions. By the twentieth century, authors reflected the many advancements made in the labour market and in society through their works. As such, their characters are portrayed as seeking careers for self-fulfilment and autonomy, rather than marriage.

⁴⁰ Miller 193.

Part II. American Literature

Chapter Six: Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*, and Louisa May Alcott's *Work: A Story of Experience*

When considering antebellum American novels published during 1820- 1860, it is imperative to mention the sentimental works written by women, many of which have since been overlooked. Recent scholarship has been able to revive some of these forgotten novelists, however, the majority of their works continue to be neglected, and are currently out of print. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain are important nineteenth-century writers, yet, there are also women who achieved similar, if not greater, critical acclaim in their own time. In 1855 Hawthorne declared,

America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is so occupied with their trash. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the *Lamplighter*, and other books neither better nor worse?—worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000.¹

The “scribbling women” Hawthorne refers to are writers such as Augusta J. Evans Wilson, Fanny Fern, Maria McIntosh, Caroline Lee Hentz, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to name a few, who dominated the literary marketplace. In fact, their novels were so popular, that they often outsold those of their male counterparts; for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) sold only about 10,000 copies in its first year, while Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) sold over 300,000.² Despite the immense popularity of women writers at this time, novels such as Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), E. D. E. N. Southworth's *The Deserted Wife* (1850), Maria Susanna Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854),

¹ As quoted in Frank L. Mott, *Golden Multitudes* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947) 122.

² Susan Belasco, introduction, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*, by Fanny Fern (New York: Penguin, 1997) xxxiv.

and Marion Harland's *Alone* (1854) are now recognised only by a handful of scholars. The omission of these works from most critical studies is partly due to the fact that they have been marginalised into a subgenre of American fiction, and identified as domestic or sentimental novels. Mostly taking place in the home, and dealing with marriage and motherhood, these works all have similar narratives. According to Nina Baym, "The many novels all tell, with variations, a single tale. In essence, it is a story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world."³ While most of these novels culminate in happy marriages, I will examine two that provide alternative endings for their heroines: *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* (1855), by Fanny Fern, pseud. Sarah Payson Willis Parton, and Louisa May Alcott's *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873). In both these novels, the heroines are portrayed as achieving financial independence, autonomy, and self-fulfilment through labour. Although *Work* was published in 1873, Alcott began writing it "as a semiautobiographical account of her struggles during the 1850s, [but] revised [it] after the Civil War to reflect her changing attitudes toward social justice, women's work, domesticity and community."⁴ For this reason, and because it addresses many of the issues brought forth in antebellum fiction, I have decided to discuss it alongside *Ruth Hall*, despite it being published almost twenty years later. For simplicity's sake, I will discuss the novels in chronological order, and focus on the affective labours of Fern's Ruth Hall and Alcott's Christie Devon.

It is important to first establish Fern's background to fully understand the autobiographical component of *Ruth Hall*. Parton (1811-1872) was born in Portland, Maine to Nathaniel Willis, a "deacon of the Park Street Congregational Church and earned a living

³ Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978) 11.

⁴ Joy S. Kasson, introduction, *Work: A Story of Experience*, by Louisa May Alcott (New York: Penguin, 1994) xi.

by publishing tracts and devotional books.”⁵ Her brother Nathaniel Parker Willis later became a writer, poet, as well as editor and founder of the *American Monthly Magazine* in 1829. Parton married twice in her life, first to Charles Harrington Eldredge in 1837 (he died soon after from typhoid fever), and then to Samuel P. Farrington in 1849, who she eventually left to pursue her writing career. Despite having her articles rejected by her brother, Parton was offered positions at Boston’s *Olive Branch* and *True Flag*; it is here that her pen name “Fanny Fern” was created. Within the next year she accepted an offer from New York’s *Musical World and Times*, to write exclusively for them for a higher wage. Having established her career as a journalist, Fern went on to collect and publish her articles in her first book, *Fern Leaves from Fanny’s Portfolio* (1853). Following her success with the text, Fern moved to New York to write for the *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post*, furthering her popularity and reputation. Soon after, in December of 1854, *Ruth Hall* was published by the Mason Brothers. Within the first year, the novel “sold 70,000 copies,”⁶ launching her success as a novelist in the literary marketplace. In fact, she was so popular that in 1855 she was put “under contract for a column at a hundred dollar a week”⁷ for the New York *Ledger*, the most money offered to a journalist in her time.

Throughout her literary career, Fern wrote many articles that addressed women’s issues using a very cheeky and witty style; of course these ideas are also reiterated in *Ruth Hall*. As Karen A. Weyler asserts, in these sketches “Fern depicts the monotonous, unstimulating, oftentimes humiliating nature of female labour, whether that of housemaids, shop girls, seamstresses, factory workers, or mothers who labour in the home.”⁸ In “Soliloquy of a Housemaid” (1852), Fern comments on the difficult circumstances surrounding domestic workers. Years later she takes a similar approach in “Tyrants of the Shop” (1867), where she

⁵ Belasco xx.

⁶ Belasco xxxiv.

⁷ Baym 251.

⁸ Karen A. Weyler, “Literary Labours and intellectual Prostitution: Fanny Fern’s Defence of Working Women,” *South Atlantic Review* 70.2 (2005): 104.

criticizes the oppressive nature of the male employers whilst defending the shop girls who have no other choice but to withstand these conditions for an income. Similarly, in “The Working-Girls of New York” (1868), Fern discusses the daily schedule of the “care-worn working girl,”⁹ comparing the girls that work in the factories, to “machines.”¹⁰ Fern’s essays not only address women’s labour; some even engage with sensitive subjects, such as prostitution. For instance, the essays “Sewing Machines” (1853), “Whom does it Concern” (1858), and “Blackwell’s Island No.3” (1858), all establish the causes of prostitution to be poor working conditions and insufficient wages. It is also important to mention the article “A Bit of Injustice” (1861), where Fern addresses society’s reactions to women’s unconventional labours:

As a general thing there are few people who speak approbatively of a woman who has a smart business talent of capability. No matter how isolated or destitute her condition, the majority would consider it more “feminine” would she unobtrusively gather up her thimble, and, retiring into some out-of-the-way-place, gradually scoop out her coffin with it, rather than to develop that smart turn for business which would lift her at once out of her troubles; and which, in a man so situated, would be applauded as exceedingly praiseworthy.¹¹

This particular passage is significant because it so closely relates to Hyacinth’s letter to Ruth in *Ruth Hall*, where he refuses to publish her articles and instead advises her to “seek some unobtrusive employment.”¹² Rather than labouring as a needlewoman or a seamstress

⁹ “The Working-Girls of New York,” *Folly As It Flies* (1868), rpt. in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 346.

¹⁰ “The Working-Girls of New York,” *Folly As It Flies* (1868), rpt. in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 348.

¹¹ “A Bit of Injustice,” *New York Ledger* [New York] 8 Jun. 1861, rpt. in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 318.

¹² Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*, ed. Susan Belasco (New York: Penguin 1997) 147. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

(positions that were both monotonous and poorly compensated), Fern urges women to “develop that smart turn for business,” an idea which is fully explored in *Ruth Hall*. Lastly, in “The Women of 1867” (1867), Fern suggests that women write in an effort to express themselves and stave off boredom: “Write! ... Not for the world’s eye, unless you choose, but to lift yourselves out of the dead-level of your lives; to keep off inanition; to lessen the number who are yearly added to the lunatic asylums from the ranks of misappreciated, unhappy womanhood, narrowed by the lives made up of details.”¹³ Although Fern herself wrote primarily for capital, she did see the benefits in women occupying themselves with something more fulfilling, rather than the monotonous female activities: “gridirons and darning-needles.”¹⁴ This too is explored in *Ruth Hall*, when Fern establishes that her eponymous heroine had an aversion to such hobbies.

Undoubtedly *Ruth Hall* is based on Fern’s life, encompassing her failed relationships with her family (especially her father and brother), the death of her husband, and her search for financial security and autonomy through writing. Despite the countless similarities which will be mentioned throughout this chapter, Ruth independently finds success and economic security (rather than getting remarried as Fern did herself), aiding to the powerful message the novel hopes to emit: women can achieve success in the literary marketplace and attain financial autonomy on their own.¹⁵

At the time of its publication, *Ruth Hall* was negatively received. Publications attacked Fern for promoting women’s financial independence, and for depicting a woman who did not embody the feminine ideal. According to the *Putnam*’s review, the novel is “full

¹³ “The Women of 1867,” *New York Ledger* [New York] 10 Aug. 1867, rpt in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 344.

¹⁴ “The Women of 1867,” *New York Ledger* [New York] 10 Aug. 1867, rpt in *Ruth Hall and other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986) 342.

¹⁵ Although Fern married James Parton in 1856 (having already established herself as a prominent journalist), she decided to omit this significant event in *Ruth Hall* so as not to overshadow Ruth’s success and economic independence.

and overflowing with an unfemininely bitter wrath and spite.”¹⁶ Others took a more drastic approach: for example, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* refused to review the novel, stating, “As a writer, the author of this volume has been very successful and very popular. Her success and popularity may be increased by this ‘domestic tale;’ but, as we never interfere in family affairs, we must leave readers to judge for themselves.”¹⁷ In an effort to explain the unfavourable reviews of the time, Joyce W. Warren suggests that *Ruth Hall* was criticized for promoting women’s revolt against the oppressive nature of a patriarchal and capitalist society: “the construction of women as financially dependent ensured the maintenance of patriarchal capitalism, and the association of female independence with immorality was an insidious way of preventing women from attempting to change the status quo.”¹⁸ Despite the backlash, there were some critics who appreciated the novel’s themes. Hetty Hall in *Indiana American* asserts:

The tacit condemnation of *Ruth Hall*, by a few editors of *distinction*, is only another evidence that even *genius* itself cannot escape the storm of *critical* wrath Her book is no fabled representation of human nature, and if there has ever been an exception, where the long injured and broken spirited daughter and sister was justified in turning teacher and castigator, then Ruth has found it, and used it, simply, beautifully, with point....¹⁹

The reviewer for the *New-York Daily Tribune* provides the following review:

It has been reserved to this distinguished authoress to achieve what may, under the circumstances, be regarded as the most brilliant success ever obtained by an American writer of fiction. “RUTH HALL”... has in two months since its

¹⁶ “Editorial Notes—American Literature,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art*, 5.26 [New York] Feb. 1855: 216.

¹⁷ “Literary Notices,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 50 [Philadelphia] Feb. 1855: 176.

¹⁸ Joyce W. Warren, “Fracturing Gender: Woman’s Economic Independence,” *Nineteenth-century American Women Writers: A Critical Reader*, ed. Karen L. Kilcup. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998): 152.

¹⁹ Hetty Hall, “*Ruth Hall*,” *Indiana American* [Indiana] 30 Mar. 1855: 1.

first appearance, reached a greatly larger sale than any other American work of fiction whatever within the same period.²⁰

Under the “Notices of New Books,” the *New-York Daily Times* states: “If Fanny Fern were a man,—a man who believed that the gratification of revenge were a proper occupation for one who has been abused, and that those who have injured us are fair game, *Ruth Hall* would be a natural and excusable book.”²¹ It is clear that the outrage towards *Ruth Hall* is rooted in the way Fern addresses the existing double standard, which attacked women for daring to leave the home and become financially independent.

Although the reviews during the time *Ruth Hall* was published were mixed, contemporary scholars have a more positive attitude towards the novel; through Ruth, Fern is able to give a woman independent financial success, directly challenging women’s submissive, dependent position in patriarchal American society. Susan K. Harris also discusses the way in which *Ruth Hall* symbolizes women’s potential for autonomy: “the novel makes it clear that the brother, in-laws, publishers, and employers Fern attacks stand for the establishment that deprives women, first, of ways to achieve economic independence; and, second, of the voice to protest their helplessness.”²² Similarly, Baym reflects Harris’ position, asserting that “at the end of the novel the autobiographical heroine ... is satisfied with an independent career and has no wish to enter any domestic situation.”²³ While Harris and Baym focus on Ruth’s financial autonomy, Jennifer Harris discusses Ruth’s position in the literary marketplace, emphasizing how the novel “is a portrait of Ruth’s acquisition of market savvy that facilitates her ability to evaluate independently her own value.”²⁴ Ruth’s

²⁰ “New Publications,” *New-York Daily Tribune* [New York] 17 Feb. 1855): 1.

²¹ “Notices of New Books,” *New-York Daily Times* [New York] 20 Dec. 1854. 2.

²² Susan K. Harris, *19th-century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 114.

²³ Baym 252.

²⁴ Jennifer Harris, “Marketplace Transactions and Sentimental Currencies in Fanny Fern’s *Ruth Hall*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 20.1 (2006): 349.

affective labours (writing), or according to Karen A. Weyler, “literary labours,”²⁵ and her mental affective labouring (mentally considering the best financial options) are what allow Ruth to assess the literary market and get the most capital for her work, thereby providing her with financial independence. By analysing the text through the lens of affective labour, it can be discerned that Ruth’s success lies in her mental and emotional affective labours.

Early on in the novel, Fern describes Ruth’s desires in finding a suitable man to love and marry. These aspirations are met when she marries Harry and subsequently mothers two children, Katy and Nettie. Although the novel’s beginning is representative of so many domestic novels, Harry’s death leaves Ruth and her children poor and destitute. Having no help, nor support, from her father or her in-laws, Ruth has no choice but to find work in an effort to earn a living and provide for her children.

At the outset Fern establishes Ruth as being submissive and “grace[ful]” (6), completely embodying the feminine ideal patriarchal society valued. Despite Ruth’s content with marriage and motherhood, she displays an aversion to traditionally feminine activities and labours:

For the common female employments and recreations, she had an unqualified disgust. Satin patchwork, the manufacture of German worsted animals, bead-netting, crotchet-stitching, long discussions with milliners, dress-makers, and modistes, long forenoons spent in shopping, or leaving bits of paste-board, party-giving, party-going, prinking and coquetting, all these were her aversion. (56)

The alliteration, “paste-board, party-giving, party-going, prinking,” and the exaggerated descriptions emphasize the tedious nature of these activities. The passage suggests that Ruth has an equal distaste for “female employments,” such as needlework, and female

²⁵ Weyler 99.

“recreations,” such as “coquetting.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “recreation” as “a pleasurable exercise;”²⁶ by stating that women’s employments and recreations are analogous, Fern is establishing that Ruth is not the traditional heroine. Even though Ruth seeks all the possible respectable labours for women, she is unable to find steady employment as a seamstress or needlewoman, and more importantly doesn’t enjoy the monotony or the wages that are offered.

After exhausting all possible job options, Ruth decides to write for the newspapers:

A thought! why could not Ruth write for the papers? How very odd it had never occurred to her before? Yes, write for the papers—why not? She remembered that while at boarding-school, an editor of a paper in the same town used often to come in and take down her compositions in short-hand as she read them aloud, and transfer them to the columns of his paper. She certainly *ought* to write better now than she did when an inexperienced girl. She would begin that very night; but where to make a beginning? who would publish her articles? how much would they pay her? to whom should she apply first? There was her brother Hyacinth, now the prosperous editor of the Irving Magazine; oh, if he would only employ her? Ruth was quite sure she could write as well as some of his correspondents, whom he had praised with no niggardly pen. She would prepare samples to send immediately, announcing her intention, and offering them for his acceptance. This means of support would be so congenial, so absorbing. At the needle one’s mind could still be brooding over sorrowful thoughts. (145-6)

The free indirect discourse of the passage illustrates Ruth’s consciousness as well as her affective labour (mental calculation). The italicization of “*ought*” signifies Ruth’s uncertainty

²⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

and self-doubt in pursuing a career in writing. Although it seems to her that she should have the tools to write good articles due to her education, she lacks the confidence because of her previous failures (rejected for the teaching position in the Primary School, and unable to find a position as a seamstress). Nevertheless, she goes forth with her idea, believing that this kind of employment will be pleasant and “absorbing,” rather than monotonous, as with all the other “common female employments” (56). The metaphor of the “needle” presents an analogy of her mind’s aim, to the needle of a compass that points in a specific direction; although her mind is focused on her literary endeavour, she is worried her past experiences will continue to trouble her. In an event that mirrors Fern’s life, Ruth’s brother Hyacinth directs her to find some other “*unobtrusive* employment” (147), and denies to help her in any way. Having tried that approach and failed, Ruth is determined to seek a publisher on her own, knowing full well the obstacles and tribulations that await her:

“I *can* do it, I *feel* it, I *will* do it,” and she closed her lips firmly; “but there will be a desperate struggle first,” and she clasped her hands over her heart as if it had already commenced; “there will be scant meals, and sleepless nights, and weary days, and a throbbing brow, and an aching heart; there will be the chilling tone, the rude repulse; there will be ten backward steps to one forward. *Pride* must sleep! but—” and Ruth glanced at her children—“it shall be *done*.” (147)

The italicized “can,” “feel,” and “will” demonstrate the importance of her resolve. Initially, Ruth feels that she has the possibility of achieving her goal, as illustrated through the word “*feel*,” later, she is confident in her intent to do so, as indicated by the word “*will*.” Although Ruth knows that she will have to overcome the struggles that loom ahead, she is determined to succeed: “it shall be *done*.” Despite her resolution, she is unable to provide for both her children in her current situation; she has no choice but to send Katy to her in-laws, with the

aim of bringing her back when she is financially stable. It is at this point in the novel that Ruth changes from the meek, feminine ideal, to the clever, driven, business woman; she wants to achieve financial security and most importantly bring back Katy.

When Ruth finally finds employment at *The Standard*, she writes under the alias “Floy” to protect her identity and reputation. However, having to balance motherhood with her career, the only time that she is able to write undisturbed is during the night:

Scratch—scratch—scratch, went Ruth’s pen; the dim lamp flickering in the night breeze, while the deep breathing of the little sleepers was the watchword, *On!* to her throbbing brow and weary fingers. One o’clock—two o’clock—three o’clock—the lamp burns low in the socket. Ruth lays down her pen, and pushing back the hair from her forehead, leans faint and exhausted against the window-sill, that the cool night-air may fan her heated temples. How impressive the stillness! Ruth can almost hear her own heart beat. She looks upward, and the watchful stars seem to her like the eyes of gentle friends. No, God would *not* forsake her! A sweet peace steals into her troubled heart, and the overtasked lids droop heavily over the weary eyes. (161)

In this passage Fern describes Ruth’s affective labour, indicated through writing, as well as her mental and physical exhaustion, consequences of overworking her mind and body. The animated, dramatic language of the passage, and the hyperbole-“throbbing brow,” “heated temples,” “overtasked lids,” “weary eyes”-emphasize the physical effects Ruth experiences as a result of her continuous mental strain. Fern also uses several literary devices to depict the tiresome nature of Ruth’s labour. The onomatopoeia in “Scratch—scratch—scratch” imitates the sound the pen is making as she furiously writes. The passage also displays two different tenses, which further illustrate the long hours she spends writing: the past tense in “went Ruth’s pen,” and the present tense in “One o’clock—two o’clock—three o’clock, the lamp

burns low.” Fern also challenges the established notions of labour, by showing how mental and emotional labours are draining. It is evident that manual labour requires physical exertion, and can affect the body negatively. However, through this novel Fern is depicting affective labour as mentally and physically demanding, establishing the idea that using the mind for labour is just as demanding as using the body. Despite Ruth’s tedious labour, the end of the passage seems hopeful. The simile in the line “the watchful stars seem to her like the eyes of gentle friends” suggests that despite the difficult work ahead, God and the stars are watching over her and offering her comfort.

Later on in the novel Ruth undergoes “phrenological examination” (215) which demonstrates the extent of her mental labour. The professor asserts that she has “an immense power of will,” and “possess[es] a tenacity of purpose and perseverance in action” (216). He continues:

Whatever you do, such as embroidery, drawing, painting, needlework, or any artistic performance, is very nicely done. Your constructiveness is very large. You can plan well; can lay out work for others to advantage; can cut out things, and invent new and tasteful fashions....

“You exhibit a predominance of the reflective intellect over the perceptive, and are characterized for thought, judgment, and the power to comprehend ideas, more than for your knowledge of things, facts, circumstances or conditions of things. You remember and understand what you read, better than what you see and hear; still, you are more than ordinarily observant.... You have a pliable mind. You love acting, and would excel as an actress. You have great powers of sarcasm. You enjoy fun highly, but it must be of the right kind. You will tolerate nothing low. You are precise in the use of language, and are a good verbal critic. (218-9)

All of Ruth's mental qualities, "reflective intellect," her "thought, judgment, and the power to comprehend ideas," enable her to labour affectively as a writer and business woman.

However, Ruth's exceptional capabilities come with a price: "these are *mental* characteristics not *physical*, and your mind often tires out your body..." (216). As we have seen in a previous passage, and in previous chapters, excessive affective labouring can cause physical exhaustion.²⁷ Although Ruth falls victim to this exhaustion, her affective labour ultimately secures her success.

Indeed, Ruth's labouring pays off as her articles receive much attention, even increasing the subscriptions for *The Standard*, and in turn, their profits. Hoping that her popularity will justify a raise, she asks Mr. Lescom for an increase in pay. At first she mistakenly decides to appeal to him as a mother, and explains that the additional money "will be bread for my children" (167). When her request is denied, Ruth refuses to be defeated. The episode motivates her to find another newspaper to publish her articles for additional pay, and teaches her to take a business approach when dealing with editors and money in the future.

Until this point in the novel Fern has depicted Ruth's affective labour only through writing. Yet, the second half of the novel displays Ruth labouring mentally in the business sphere as well. Her mental labour is most evident in her negotiations of the literary marketplace, specifically as she fights for higher wages with the editors of *The Standard* and *The Pilgrim*, and finally with the publication of her novel. Seeing that her pleas to Mr. Lescom on behalf of her children's welfare go unanswered, Ruth takes a different approach in her meeting with Mr. Tibbetts, editor of *The Pilgrim*. According to Ann D. Wood,

Above all, a woman writer was not to display her economic need. If she did, she was clearly threatening, reminding an absent husband or a neglectful father, or men in general, of their failure to support her in the graceful

²⁷ For instance, Jenny in Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee*, and Laura in *The Creators*, both suffer from exhaustion.

domestic sphere for which she was presumably formed, and implying that she might now actively take from them what they refused to give.²⁸

As a result, when Ruth asks for a position at *The Pilgrim*, she not once refers to children, or indicates that she has a family, nor does she mention that she is working to support them. Instead, she takes a strictly commercial approach, negotiating with the editors for her future wages in a business-like manner:

“Oh—hum—hum!” said Mr. Tibbetts, changing his tone; “so you are ‘Floy,’ are you?” (casting his eyes on her.) “What pay do they give you over there?”

Ruth was a novice in business-matters, but she had strong common sense, and that common sense said, he has no right to ask you that question; don’t you tell him; so she replied with dignity, “My bargain, sir, with Mr. Lescom was a private one, I believe.”

“Hum,” said the foiled Mr. Tibbetts; adding in an under-tone to his partner, “sharp that!”

“Well, if I conclude to engage you,” said Mr. Tibbetts, “I should prefer you would write for me over a different signature than the one by which your pieces are indicated at The Standard office, or you can write exclusively for my paper.”

“With regard to your first proposal,” said Ruth, “if I have gained any reputation by my first efforts, it appears to me that I should be foolish to throw it away by the adoption of another signature; and with regard to the last, I have no objection to writing exclusively for you, if you will make it worth my while.”

“Sharp again,” whispered Tibbetts to his partner.

²⁸ Ann D. Wood, “The ‘Scribbling Woman’ and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote,” *American Quarterly* 23.1 (1971): 10.

The two editors then withdrawing into a further corner of the office, a whispered consultation followed, during which Ruth heard the words, "Can't afford it, Tom; hang it! we are head over ears in debt now to that paper man; good articles though—deuced good—must have her if we dispense with some of our other contributors. We had better begin low though, as to terms, for she'll go up now like a rocket, and when she finds out her value we shall have to increase her pay, you know."

(Thank you, gentlemen, thought Ruth, when the cards change hands, I'll take care to return the compliment.) (168-9)

The initial stages of Ruth's evolution, from a housewife to a "sharp" businesswoman, are evident in this passage. Ruth's knowledge of the literary marketplace is evident in her negotiation; she maintains her pen name "Floy," and negotiates a higher pay for her articles. As with Mr. Lescom, Mr. Tibbetts tries to take advantage of Ruth by paying her less than she is worth. Despite the "poor" (169) pay, Ruth accepts the contract because "she could at present do no better, and because every pebble serves to swell the current" (169). According to Susan K. Harris, even though Ruth isn't given the money she is worth, it does represent a significant point in the novel: "[this] mark[s] an important step in her evolution from passive victim to active speaker. Not only does she speak, she demands; not only does she demand, she does so in the language of the business world. And she also gathers ammunition for further attacks."²⁹ In fact, the last lines of the passage "Thank you, gentlemen, thought Ruth, when the cards change hands, I'll take care to return the compliment," indicate that Ruth is aware that they are cheating her out of more money, and in fact will alter her situation as soon as it's feasible.

²⁹ Susan K. Harris 124.

An interesting addition to the novel is the inclusion of “Floy’s” fan mail; it is through these letters that Fern establishes Ruth’s rising popularity. It is also through these letters that Ruth receives a promising proposition by Mr. John Walter, offering her a more lucrative arrangement at the *Household Messenger*:

I know something about the prices paid contributors for the periodical press, and have often wondered whether you were receiving anything like such a remuneration as your genius and practical newspaperial talent entitle you to. I have also often wished to write you on the subject, and tell you what I think is your market-value—to speak in business phrase—as a writer; so that in case you are *not* receiving a just compensation, as things go, you might know it, and act accordingly. In meditating upon the subject, it has occurred to me that I might benefit you and myself at the same time, and in a perfectly legitimate manner, by engaging you to write solely for my paper. I have made a calculation as to what I can afford to give you, or rather what I *will* give you, for writing one article a week for me, the article to be on any subject, and of any length you please. Such an arrangement would of course give you time to take more pains with your writing, and also afford you such leisure for relaxation, as every writer needs. (183-4)

Throughout the letter Mr. Walter makes it clear that he understands and values Ruth’s literary “genius.” Naturally, Ruth resigns from *The Pilgrim* and *The Standard*, and begins to write exclusively for the *Household Messenger*. The position not only gives Ruth the opportunity to express herself freely, but also furthers her career as a writer. Most importantly, it is at this point that Ruth takes ownership of her value in the literary marketplace; her artistic genius will no longer be compromised, and she will never allow a newspaper to take advantage of

her popularity again. Furthermore, by understanding her own market value, Ruth can now assess the literary business, and make the right financial choices.

When a publishing house gives Ruth the chance to publish her articles in a book, offering \$800 for the copyright, Ruth considers the pros and cons very carefully: “it *was* a temptation; but supposing her book should prove a hit? and bring double, treble, fourfold that sum, to go into her publisher’s pockets instead of hers? how provoking! Ruth straightened up, and putting on a very resolute air, said, “No, gentlemen, I will *not* sell you my copyright... (197). Again, Fern’s is illustrating Ruth’s consciousness and her mental affective labour. The italicized “*not*” indicates how strongly Ruth feels about her decision. Despite having no experience in the business side of writing, Ruth is still able to make smart choices regarding the market value of her potential book through affective labour. By mentally considering the expected demand of her book, Ruth resolves that keeping hold of her copyright will eventually prove more fruitful:

I am a novice in such matters, you know, but I cannot help thinking, Mr. Walter, that my book will be a success. You will see that I have acted upon that impression, and refused to sell my copyright.”

“You don’t approve it?” said she, looking a little confused, as Mr. Walter bent his keen eyes on her, without replying.

“But I do though,” said he; “I was only thinking how excellent a substitute strong common-sense may be for experience. Your answer is brief, concise, sagacious, and business-like; I endorse it unhesitatingly. It is just what I should have advised you to write. You are correct in thinking that your book will be popular, and wise in keeping the copyright in your own hands. In how incredibly short a time you have gained a literary reputation, Floy.” (210-11)

Ruth's "common-sense," and "business-like" manner in addressing the offer reflect on her mental affective labour, namely assessing the value of her work. According to Harris, "in maintaining copyright over her own works she is affirming her ongoing value, as opposed to understanding her worth in terms of a singular transaction—not unlike marriage—after which she possesses nothing."³⁰ Being able to accomplish such a reputation as a writer is an incredible feat, especially because she is a woman in a male dominated industry. Fern establishes her success by asserting "AND now our heroine had become a regular business woman" (223). According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "business" usually refers to "a person's official or professional duties as a whole; stated occupation, profession, or trade; especially serious occupation, work, as opposed to pleasure or recreation."³¹ Historically, the terms "business-man" and "business-woman," have stark contrasts in dates of origin. For example, "business-man" first appears in 1803, while "business-woman" originates in the 1844 American newspaper, the *Southern Literary Messenger*; in Britain, "business-woman" appears at a much later date, in John Betjeman's 1958 poem titled "Business Girls."³² Overall, it can be assumed that the term "business-woman" refers to a woman who works in a business. By using the terms "regular business woman," Fern is establishing that Ruth's occupation and status in the literary marketplace are equivalent to those of men. Ruth has had to face and surpass obstacles, cleverly negotiate propositions, manage her career in a business-like manner, and even care for her children, throughout the novel. The publication of her work to predominantly favourable reviews cements the fact that Ruth has evolved from wife and mother to successful "business woman." The novel ends with a triumphant outcome: Ruth buys stock shares in a bank, becomes financially independent, and Katy returns to her home. As Kristie Hamilton asserts, "by making Ruth a stockholder, Parton [Fern] reinforces a socioeconomic and indeed a literary paradigm that identifies success and happy endings with

³⁰ Jennifer Harris 352.

³¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

³² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

capital, if not marriage.”³³ Jennifer Harris reflects Hamilton’s opinion, stating that the “form of public capital symbolizes her financial freedom and her public investment....”³⁴ Although writing has earned her a substantial amount of capital, which in turn has made her financially independent, it can be considered as a predominantly affective labour; her articles are products of affective labour, because of the emotional and mental labour they require. Furthermore, affective labouring is also evident in Ruth’s mental calculation when considering her market value and her financial prospects. Thus, *Ruth Hall* is a novel that challenges societal norms by redefining the feminine ideal; by making Ruth a strong business woman who achieves economic independence through writing, Fern is suggesting that women do have the ability to become as successful as men.

Louisa May Alcott’s *Work: A Story of Experience* also advocates women’s need for financial independence. Through the text’s heroine, Christie Devon, Alcott chronicles the experiences many women face in their quest for happiness and autonomy. The book was serialized in the *Christian Union* from 1872 to 1873, and subsequently published by Roberts Brothers of Boston as a novel in 1873. Alcott began writing the novel in 1861; despite its publication nearly twenty years later, it still reflects many of the themes of antebellum fiction. Although Alcott was a popular novelist in late nineteenth-century America, she was mostly known for her children’s novels, especially *Little Women* (1868). Yet, her involvement with the American Suffrage Association and her feminist articles in various newspapers and periodicals are important as well. Like Fanny Fern, Alcott bases *Work* on her own life and experiences in the labour market.

Work was generally well-received at the time of its publication. According to the *Boston Daily Advertiser*,

³³ Kristie Hamilton, “The Politics of Survival: Sara Parton’s *Ruth Hall* and the Literature of Labor,” *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995) 103.

³⁴ Jennifer Harris 356.

[*Work*] is admirable. It is a interesting enough as a story to win and hold innumerable readers, while its healthful tone, its thorough nobleness, its pure democracy and practical Christianity cannot be over-praised.... If half the thousands who will read this book will profit by it and put its lessons into practice, it will do more good in the working world than all the labour-reform conventions ever held, and all the speeches and pamphlets on the subject ever printed. It is not a new gospel, but the old one told anew, and applied to the troubles today.³⁵

The Literary World has a similar sentiment and asserts,

Work is a story which leaves upon the mind a very warm and vivid impression. It is earnest, animated, highly dramatic, and in parts exceedingly, although never weakly, tender. The characters are life-like and varied; there is a genuine plot,—pretty if not profound. The purpose of the book is healthful and noble, and so thoroughly *infused*, or wrought into the story, and so quietly enforced by the easy development of the latter, that it will come very near doing positive good.³⁶

The novel also received critical acclaim overseas. For *The British Quarterly Review*, *Work* “is full of vigour, keen discrimination, racy characterization, and effective dialogue. Christie, the heroine, is a finely balanced character, good enough and noble enough to win our sympathies and to stimulate our better feelings.... The story is a very able and very wholesome one.”³⁷

Although many praised Alcott’s novel and its message, others thought her new field of writing was a failure. For example, the *Springfield Daily Republican* criticises Alcott’s departure from writing children’s books, and comments,

³⁵ “Miss Alcott’s *Work*,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* [Boston] 9 Jun. 1873: 3-4, rpt. in *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Beverly Lyon Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 183-5.

³⁶ “*Work*,” *The Literary World* [New York] 1 Jul. 1873: 18-9, rpt. in *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Beverly Lyon Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 197.

³⁷ “*Work, A Story of Experience*,” *The British Quarterly Review* [London] Oct. 1873: 589-90.

Miss Alcott's *Work, A Story of Experience*, is not one of the few perfect novels, nor does it stand in the first or second rank among novels. It has remarkable merits, and a great many of them, but it also has certain very grave defects, and fails to produce, on the whole, the impression that the author obviously intended to make.³⁸

Similarly, *The Athenaeum* asserts: "*Work: A Story of Experience*, is full of good and excellent passages; but we miss the cheery energy there was in the *Old Fashioned Girl*, *Little Women*, *Good Wives*, and other works, too numerous to specify, for which we have to thank Miss Alcott."³⁹ Recent scholarship identifies *Work* as a key text in nineteenth-century fiction. According to Tara Fitzpatrick, "The novel provides a glimpse of the profound ambivalence that beset nineteenth-century Americans, especially middle-class northern white women, when they attempted to sort out the proper roles of women and men, home and work, love and duty, self-denial and self-reliance, sacrifice and reward."⁴⁰ For Susan K Harris, the novel addresses the problems marriage poses for women's self-development: "The identifiable 'problem' in *Work* is far more complex than in earlier novels: it is the problem of patriarchy, of women's definition by a culture that forbids them 'self-knowledge,' 'self-control,' 'self-help.'"⁴¹ Elaine Showalter also focuses on the portrayal of woman's self-development and comments, "*Work* is a bildungsroman based on *Pilgrim's Progress*, with the heroine Christie Devon (the female version of Bunyan's Christian) setting out to find her own Celestial City of self-fulfilment,"⁴² one she finds through various kinds of work. Although most scholars

³⁸ "Miss Alcott's New Novel: Its Characters and Characteristics," *Springfield Daily Republican* [Springfield] 12 Jun. 1873: 4+, rpt. in *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Beverly Lyon Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 190.

³⁹ "Two American Tales," *The Athenaeum* [London] 26 Jul. 1873: 111.

⁴⁰ Tara Fitzpatrick, "Love's Labour's Reward: The Sentimental Economy of Louisa May Alcott's *Work*," *NWSA Journal* 5.1 (1993): 30.

⁴¹ Susan K. Harris 177.

⁴² Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2010) 197.

praise the radical themes of the novel, some criticise its form and “the breaks and shifts in text,”⁴³ while others question its realism. According to Eugenia Kaledin,

Work fails to come to terms with the actualities of wages and working conditions for women, even though its heroine is driven to the brink of suicide by her inability to survive alone. Instead of suggesting the need for reforms *Work* seems to justify the status quo by letting the heroine’s good nature lead to marriage as the solution to her problems.⁴⁴

Yet, what Kaledin fails to address is that Christie continues to labour after she marries (and after her husband passes away), as an orator for the women’s movement. Although Christie works in a wide range of jobs (housemaid, governess, companion, seamstress, gardener, and nurse), I will focus on her work as an actress and orator. My examination of the text will argue that acting and orating are indeed affective labour. I will also briefly discuss the circumstances that lead to her decision to commit suicide, and the way in which she surpasses poverty and depression through self-fulfilment.

Alcott introduces the reader to Christie’s determined and independent nature at the outset. The novel begins when Christie tells her aunt that she will be leaving their home to support herself:

“AUNT BETSEY, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence.”

“Bless and save us, what do you mean, child?” And the startled old lady precipitated a pie into the oven with destructive haste.

“I mean that, being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer. Uncle wishes me out of the way; thinks I ought to go, and,

⁴³ Jean Fagan Yellin, “From Success to Experience: Louisa May Alcott’s *Work*,” *The Massachusetts Review* 21.3 (1980): 538.

⁴⁴ Eugenia Kaledin, “Louisa May Alcott: Success and the Sorrow of Self-denial,” *Women’s Studies* 5 (1978): 255.

sooner or later, will tell me so. I don't intend to wait for that, but, like the people in fairy tales, travel away into the world and seek my fortune. I know I can find it.”⁴⁵

The first few lines of the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” are the lines Christie is referring to when she announces her plan. Christie seeks “life, liberty and ... happiness,” or more specifically freedom from the constraints of the private domestic sphere, and autonomy. Although she is currently dependent on her aunt and uncle, she is prepared to find a job that will make her self-sufficiency possible:

“You say I am discontented, proud and ambitious; that's true, and I'm glad of it. I am discontented, because I can't help feeling that there is a better sort of life than this dull one made up of everlasting work, with no object but money.... I'm willing to work, but I want work that I can put my heart into, and feel that it does me good, no matter how hard it is. I only ask for a chance to be a useful, happy woman, and I don't think that is a bad ambition.” (10-11)

Christie is “discontent” with the housework she does because she feels it has no purpose. The lines “I want work that I can put my heart into, and feel that it does me good,” suggest that she is more concerned with finding self-fulfilment and happiness through her labour, rather than making money.

At the time, there were only a few respectable jobs offered to women: domestic servitude, needlework, and teaching as a governess. Yet, because teaching was considered one of the best kinds of labour for women, one that also offered adequate wages, there was overcrowding. Christie comes to this realisation quickly, and further considers her options:

⁴⁵ Louisa May Alcott, *Work: A Story of Experience*, ed. Joy S. Kasson (New York: Penguin, 1994) 5. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

So, after several disappointments, Christie decided that her education was too old-fashioned for the city, and gave up the idea of teaching. Sewing she resolved not to try till every thing else failed; and, after a few more attempts to get writing to do, she said to herself, in a fit of humility and good sense: "I'll begin at the beginning, and work my way up. I'll put my pride in my pocket, and go out to service. Housework I like, and can do well, thanks to Aunt Betsey. I never thought it degradation to do it for her, so why should I mind doing it for others if they pay for it? It isn't what I want, but it's better than idleness, so I'll try it!"(17)

Christie's resolution to seek work as a servant, even though she comes from a middle-class background, further illustrates her determination and strong will. The narrator comments on Christie's exceptional nature, and demonstrates how she differs from the many other women who fail in their struggle to attain autonomy in the following passage:

Christie was one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest and true-hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament, or principle out into the world to find support, happiness, and homes for themselves. Many turn back discouraged; more accept shadow for substance, and discover their mistake too late; the weakest lose their purpose and themselves; but the strongest struggle on, and, after danger and defeat, earn at last the best success this world can give us, the possession of a brave and cheerful spirit, rich in self-knowledge, self-control, self-help. This was the real desire of Christie's heart; this was to be her lesson and reward, and to this happy end she was slowly yet surely brought by the long discipline of life and labour. (12)

Alcott places Christie amongst the “large class of women,” because she too is trying to break through the constraints of the private sphere to achieve “self-knowledge, self-control, self-help,” and even self-fulfilment, through labour. This passage also foreshadows Christie’s eventual success; she is unlike the many women who fail, because of her strength and persistence. Although she gets work as a servant, she quickly learns that there is “degradation” (21) in being paid so little to do such work. Alcott expressed the same disdain for being a housekeeper in her 1874 essay “How I Went Out to Service,” in which she describes her experiences as a housemaid and companion:

Unable to resist the desire to see what my earnings were, I opened the purse and beheld four dollars. I have had a good many bitter minutes in my life; but one of the bitterest came to me as I stood there in the windy road, with the sixpenny pocket-book open before me, and looked from my poor chapped, grimy, chill-blained hands to the paltry sum that was considered reward enough for all the hard and humble labour they had done.⁴⁶

Alcott demonstrates the disappointment and disdain many women felt when working for long hours in return for meagre wages that hardly were enough for living.

Although Christie’s entrance in the job market is significant, her affective labour is evident in her subsequent job in the theatre. As with Gissing’s Clara in *The Nether World*, Christie labours affectively to authentically embody the character she is playing:

Presently the ballet-master appeared, the orchestra struck up, and Christie found herself marching and counter-marching at word of command. At first, a most uncomfortable sense of the absurdity of her position oppressed and confused her; then the ludicrous contrast between the solemn anxiety of the troop and the fantastic evolutions they were performing amused her till the

⁴⁶ Louisa May Alcott, “How I Went Out to Service,” *The Independent* 26 [New York] 4 Jun. 1874: 1.

novelty wore off; the martial music excited her; the desire to please sharpened her wits; and natural grace made it easy for her to catch and copy the steps and poses given her to imitate. Soon she forgot herself, entered into the spirit of the thing, and exerted every sense to please, so successfully that Mr. Tripp praised her quickness at comprehension, Lucy applauded heartily from a fairy car, and Mr. Sharp popped his head out of a palace window to watch the Amazon's descent from the Mountains of the Moon. (34)

Christie's initial tentativeness is evident as she feels "uncomfortable," "absurd," and even self-conscious on stage. Eventually her shyness subsides, and her dread evolves into excitement and "desire" to play her part as best as she can. Christie's affective labour is evident when she assumes the role of the Amazon Queen, "enter[s] into the spirit of the thing," and "exert[s] every sense to please." Christie portrays the Amazon Queen passionately and authentically, by utilising her emotional, creative, and mental faculties. Although the director initially assumes Christie is like "any girl possessing the lively fancy, sympathetic nature, and ambitious spirit which make such girls naturally dramatic" (37), his position alters when he sees how eager she is to practice: "[she] was willing to study hard, work faithfully, and wait patiently" (39). Christie reaches her full acting potential when she puts aside her insecurities, takes the advice of her mentors, and passionately emulates her character: "Believing she had little beauty to sacrifice, she dressed such parts to the life, and played them with a spirit and ease that surprised those who had considered her a dignified and rather dull young person" (39). Christie works on her craft by engaging with her roles physically and emotionally, thereby strengthening her performances. Whereas she previously was viewed as a "dull young person," her affective labour has transformed her into a skilled actress, one who acquires fame as well as a substantial amount of capital: "thirty dollars a week" (40).

Alcott initially portrays Christie's new career as promising. Yet, the reader is soon presented with the negative aspects of the profession:

But gradually she underwent the sorrowful change which comes to strong natures when they wrong themselves through ignorance or wilfulness.

Pride and native integrity kept her from the worst temptations of such a life, but to the lesser ones she yielded, growing selfish, frivolous, and vain,—intent on her own advancement, and careless by what means she reached it. She had no thought now beyond her art, no desire beyond the commendation of those whose opinion was serviceable, no care for any one but herself. (41)

Alcott may want women to achieve self-fulfilment, but she also cautions them in the way it should be realised. According to Glenn Hendler, “the theatre ... is both too public and too individual; it produces a relation between a depersonalized, potentially ‘demoralized’ audience and a performer so caught up in herself that she has lost the other-orientation that defines femininity.”⁴⁷ Faye E. Dudden mirrors these conclusions and asserts, “whenever a woman enacts a part she implicitly threatens the prevailing definition of womanhood: she shows she can become someone else and make you believe it.”⁴⁸ Indeed, after a few months in the theatre Christie has become “selfish, frivolous, and vain;” the money she has made and the fame she has achieved have corrupted her character and her femininity. Furthermore, not only is Christie's profession as an actress threatening her femininity, as Hendler and Dudden point out, it is also a reminder of the association between acting and prostitution.⁴⁹ For Tracy C. Davis,

⁴⁷ Glenn Hendler, “The Limits of Sympathy: Louisa May Alcott and the Sentimental Novel,” *American Literary History* 3.4 (1991): 696-7.

⁴⁸ Faye E. Dudden, *Women in American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 2.

⁴⁹ Refer to Chapter 6 on George Gissing's *The Nether World*, and Chapter 9 on Mary Hunter Austin's *A Woman of Genius* for a further look into the acting career of women in Victorian Britain and twentieth-century America.

No matter how consummate the artist, pre-eminent the favourite, and modest the woman, the actress could not supersede the fact that she lived a public life and consented to be “hired” for amusement by all who could command the price. For a large section of society, the similarities between the actress’s life and the prostitute’s or *demimondaine*’s were unforgettable and overruled all other evidence about respectability.⁵⁰

Fortunately, Alcott saves Christie from corruption by having her quit acting after a near fatal accident on stage. In search for a more respectable position, one that will make her happy while maintaining feminine virtues, Christie first works as a governess, then a companion, and soon after, as a seamstress.

In addition to exploring the labours offered to women at the time, Alcott also challenges contemporary attitudes to the fallen woman and society’s preconceived notions through Rachel (Christie’s only friend at the mantua-making workshop). When Rachel is fired for not being a “respectable and worthy girl” (106), Christie offers her support; yet, Christie’s decision also leads to her termination, and ultimately contributes to her own poverty and estrangement from society. Rather than let the fallen woman disappear or even succumb to prostitution (as in many previous novels), Alcott criticises society’s view of the fallen woman by having Rachel save Christie from suicide.

Christie is unable to find any other kind of work after she is fired, undoubtedly because her friendship with Rachel has tarnished her reputation. Desperate to repay her debts, Christie resorts to piecework:

While the tired hands slowly worked, the weary brain ached and burned with heavy thoughts, vain longings, and feverish fancies, till things about her sometimes seemed as strange and spectral as the phantoms that had haunted

⁵⁰ Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 69.

her half-delirious sleep. Inexpressibly wretched were the dreary days, the restless nights, with only pain and labor for companions. The world looked very dark to her, life seemed an utter failure, God a delusion, and the long, lonely years before her too hard to be endured.

It is not always want, insanity, or sin that drives women to desperate deaths; often it is a dreadful loneliness of heart, a hunger for home and friends, worse than starvation, a bitter sense of wrong in being denied the tender ties, the pleasant duties, the sweet rewards that can make the humblest life happy; a rebellious protest against God, who, when they cry for bread, seems to offer them a stone. Some of these impatient souls throw life away, and learn too late how rich it might have been with a stronger faith, a more submissive spirit. Others are kept, and slowly taught to stand and wait, till blest with a happiness the sweeter for the doubt that went before. (117-8)

The language and style of this passage exemplify the loneliness and despair Christie feels in her dire situation, an event that is all too similar to the one in *Ruth Hall*. Whereas Ruth suffers exhaustion from labouring affectively through writing, Christie's mental and physical labours are leading to her breakdown. Christie's affective labour in considering her circumstances, "the weary brain ached and burned with heavy thoughts, vain longings, and feverish fancies," is draining her so much mentally and emotionally, that she loses the ability to distinguish reality from illusion: "till things about her sometimes seemed as strange and spectral as the phantoms that had haunted her half-delirious sleep." The words "spectral," "phantoms," "haunted," and "delirious" indicate a fantasy state of being, one that is making Christie lose touch with reality. Clearly her physical exhaustion from "two days and a night of almost uninterrupted labour" (119) and her continuous mental affective labour are exacerbating her condition and driving her towards a psychotic break. When her payment for

the piecework she has completed is denied, Christie suffers a complete mental breakdown and considers suicide. Alcott depicts Christie's despair and unravelling in the following passages:

She felt as if the springs of life were running down, and presently would stop; for, even when the old question, "What shall I do?" came haunting her, she no longer cared even to try to answer it, and had no feeling but one of utter weariness. She tried to shake off the strange mood that was stealing over her, but spent body and spent brain were not strong enough to obey her will, and, in spite of her efforts to control it, the impulse that had seized her grew more intense each moment.

“Why should I work and suffer any longer for myself alone?” she thought; “why wear out my life struggling for the bread I have no heart to eat? I am not wise enough to find my place, nor patient enough to wait until it comes to me. Better give up trying, and leave room for those who have something to live for.” (123)

The overall mood of the passage is depressed and defeated. Christie is exhausted mentally and physically, suffering a “spent body and spent brain,” and has no drive to fight to survive and surpass poverty any longer. The repetition of the word “spent” further emphasizes Christie's lack of power and energy. The rhetorical questions also illustrate Christie's resignation; she is so tired of her situation that she doesn't even have the will to withstand the dreamlike state she is slowly slipping into:

She knew it was no place for her, yet no one waited for her, no one would care if she staid for ever, and, yielding to the perilous fascination that drew her there, she lingered with a heavy throbbing in her temples, and a troop of wild fancies whirling through her brain. Something white swept by below,—only a

broken oar—but she began to wonder how a human body would look floating through the night. It was an awesome fancy, but it took possession of her, and, as it grew, her eyes dilated, her breath came fast, and her lips fell apart, for she seemed to see the phantom she had conjured up, and it wore the likeness of herself.

With an ominous chill creeping through her blood, and a growing tumult in her mind, she thought, “I must go,” but still stood motionless, leaning over the wide gulf, eager to see where that dead thing would pass away. So plainly did she see it, so peaceful was the white face, so full of rest the folded hands, so strangely like, and yet unlike, herself, that she seemed to lose her identity, and wondered which was the real and which was the imaginary Christie.

Lower and lower she bent; looser and looser grew her hold upon the pillar; faster and faster beat the pulses in her temples, and the rush of some blind impulse was swiftly coming on, when a hand seized and caught her back.

(124)

Again, the bleak and depressive mood of the passage allows the reader to sympathise and empathise with Christie. Not having anyone to offer her support and help are also causing her breakdown. As she slowly loses touch with reality, she also begins to imagine and identify with the “human body” in the water. At this point, Christie’s loss of will and determination to live causes her to resemble the “phantoms” she has previously conjured. Not only are these delusions taking “possession of her,” but they are also causing her to lose her own sense of “identity.” Christie is captivated by the “dead thing” in the water, because it resembles her own body and face. In fact, it is her fascination with the body, and the tranquil aura it emits, “so peaceful was the white face,” that pulls her closer to the water; she too wants to feel the peace and rest the body appears to have. In an interesting twist of fate, Alcott has Rachel

rescue Christie from her own fall to her death, simultaneously saving Christie and giving credit to the fallen woman. Christie then spends her second chance at life by recuperating in domestic households: first at Cynthia Wilkins' home, a washerwoman she meets through Rachel, and then at David Sterling's home, a greenhouse keeper she meets through Reverend Power.

Up until this moment Alcott has explored a woman's work experience in the public sphere through Christie's ventures for labour. Christie's near suicide marks a transition for the novel; in the second half, Christie spends her time in the domestic sphere, trying to find happiness and self-fulfilment through gardening, marriage, and nursing. Although Alcott does have Christie enter a marriage with David, she avoids the traditional marriage plot by killing off David and putting Christie in a position to finally achieve autonomy and self-fulfilment through oratory.

In the last chapter, while attending a meeting of working women, Christie stands up and gives her "first speech in public since she left the stage" (332):

That early training stood her in good stead now, giving her self-possession, power of voice, and ease of gesture; while the purpose at her heart lent her the sort of simple eloquence that touches, persuades, and convinces better than logic, flattery, or oratory.

What she said she hardly knew: words came faster than she could utter them, thoughts pressed upon her, and all the lessons of her life rose vividly before her to give weight to her arguments, value to her counsel, and the force of truth to every sentence she uttered. She had known so many of the same trials, troubles, and temptations that she could speak understandingly of them; and, better still, she had conquered or outlived so many of them, that she could not only pity but help others to do as she had done....

The women felt that this speaker was one of them ... her speech simple enough for all to understand; cheerful, comforting, and full of practical suggestion, illustrations out of their own experience, and a spirit of companionship that uplifted their despondent hearts.

Yet more impressive than any thing she said was the subtle magnetism of character, for that has a universal language which all can understand. They saw and felt that a genuine woman stood down there among them like a sister, ready with head, heart, and hand to help them help themselves; not offering pity as an alms, but justice as a right. Hardship and sorrow, long effort and late-won reward had been hers they knew; wifehood, motherhood, and widowhood brought her very near to them; and behind her was the background of an earnest life, against which this figure with health on the cheeks, hope in the eyes, courage on the lips, and the ardor of a wide benevolence warming the whole countenance stood out full of unconscious dignity and beauty; an example to comfort, touch, and inspire them. (332-3)

The “early training” refers to her experience as an actress through which she learned to command the audience’s attention. The “self-possession, power of voice, and ease of gesture,” she now has are also derived from her previous career in the theatre. While the other women were unable to connect with the audience, Christie easily sympathises with, and relates to, the different classes of women in attendance. Although Hendler constitutes this as a “theatrical performance,”⁵¹ there is a distinction between acting and orating. As an actress, Christie has performed as various characters, putting her in danger of losing her own self and identity through the process. However, through oration, she has the opportunity to be true to herself. Whereas both careers require mental and emotional labour, it is through oration she is

⁵¹ Hendler 699.

finally able to achieve self-fulfilment, because she doesn't compromise her own identity. Christie inspires her audience by genuinely sharing her own "trials, troubles, and temptations." Her "magnetism" as an orator is due to her ability to express her thoughts in a creative and emotional manner.

As with Beth in Grand's *The Beth Book*, Christie's affective labour is necessary to express her ideas and encourage others to search for self-fulfilment. The ending of the novel represents her best performance and her true calling:

"Perhaps this is the task my life has been fitting me for," she said. "A great and noble one which I should be proud to accept and help accomplish if I can.... This new task seems to offer me the chance of being among the pioneers, to do the hard work, share the persecution, and help lay the foundation of a new emancipation whose happy success I may never see. Yet I had rather be remembered as those brave beginners are, though many of them missed the triumph, than as the late comers will be, who only beat the drums and wave the banners when the victory is won." (334)

It is here that we can see how Christie has fully developed through all her experiences. Describing herself as "strong-minded, a radical, and a reformer" (339), she has the confidence and motivation to join the movement and act as "a mediator to bridge across the space that now divided them from those they wished to serve." In fact, the knowledge she has gained throughout her life is what makes her competent to mend the gap between the classes. It is through this career, and through her affective labour, that Christie is able to realize her full potential and achieve self-fulfilment.

Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and Louisa May Alcott's *Work* both depict women who engage in affective labour in careers that weren't regarded as suitable for women by conventional nineteenth-century society. While Ruth labours affectively to become a

successful writer and business woman, Christie labours affectively through acting and orating, making her a respected member of the women's movement. It is through these characters that Fern and Alcott demonstrate the new opportunities that would enable women to gain financial independence and autonomy. Although I consider both of these works to be domestic novels, due to their focus on marriage and motherhood, I do think that both challenge the early nineteenth-century ideology of the True Woman. After the Civil War, women writers chose to explore new grounds for women through their protagonists. As such, the emphasis on domesticity lessened, and more importance was placed upon the vocational opportunities that were now afforded to women. In the following chapter I will discuss a novel in which the protagonist rejects domesticity, and instead focuses on a non-traditional career.

Chapter Seven: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Story of Avis*

The Civil War brought about many changes socially and politically. By the 1870s, the feminist movement gathered momentum, and women started to fight for many social reforms, among them voting rights, as well as equal education and employment opportunities. According to Elaine Showalter, “warfare redistributed some of men’s traditional power to women, and brought women’s conflicts over their roles to the surface, as conventional rules of feminine decorum were suspended, and women on the home front took over many of the jobs men left behind them, or became teachers and military nurses.”¹ The Civil War not only “eroded the boundary between male ‘battlefront’ and female ‘homefront,’”² as Elizabeth Young points out, but it also altered The Cult of True Womanhood. In the early nineteenth century, women were expected to abide by the “four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”³ However, both the Civil War and the feminist movement, altered domestic ideology and paved the way for the New Woman of the 1880s and 1890s.

In literature, the domestic novels of the 1850s and 1860s often culminated in romantic endings and marriage. In the 1870s a new kind of novel entered the literary marketplace, one, as Susan K. Harris points out, that is didactic in structure and radical in its themes. According to Harris, these novels “do not call for expanded professional opportunities for women. They do, however, lay the groundwork for such demands.... late-didactic novels valorise women who reach beyond marriage for self-definition and gratification, and who question the restrictions the marriage relation imposes on their freedom to do and be all they can.”⁴ Women writers began to depict their protagonists rejecting traditional duties, focusing on

¹ Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (London: Virago, 2010) 154-5.

² Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 2.

³ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966):152.

⁴ Susan K. Harris, *19th-century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 173.

their own self-fulfilment, and in some cases, even refusing marriage to attain vocational success. For example, Lillie Devereux Blake's *Fettered for Life* (1874) depicts a number of female characters who contest patriarchal restrictions and actively seek financial and social independence; a key character, Cornelia D'Arcy, is a doctor and suffragette, while the protagonist, Laura Stanley, studies to be an artist. In Sarah Orne Jewett's novel *A Country Doctor* (1884), Nan Prince renounces marriage in order to continue with her medical vocation. Lastly, in *Doctor Zay* (1882), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (later Ward) portrays the life of Doctor Zaidee Atlanta Lloyd. In this chapter I will discuss another novel by Phelps which not only embodies the literary trend employed by women writers after the Civil War, but displays one of the most complicated characters of this time—*The Story of Avis* (1871).

Throughout her literary career Phelps wrote many compelling articles, short stories, and novels that expressed her position on various reforms (dress, religion, vivisection) and addressed pertinent women's issues. Her first post-Civil War novel, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), became "the century's second best-selling book by a female author."⁵ The novel appealed so much to the public that by the end of the nineteenth century, "American sales would approach 100,000, while British circulation would outrun that, and the books would be translated into French, German, Dutch, and Italian."⁶ Two more spiritual novels followed its publication: *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887). In the same year that *The Gates Ajar* was published, Phelps also concentrated on the conditions of the Pemberton textile mills and the working classes, in the essay "The Tenth of January" (1868). She continued her commentary on working women and the inequality of wages in her essays "What Shall They Do" (1867) "Why Shall They Do It" (1868), and "What Are They Doing" (1871). In addition to these essays, Phelps directly challenged True Woman ideology in "The True Woman."

⁵ Christine Stansell, "Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: A Study in Female Rebellion," *The Massachusetts Review* 12.1/2 (1972): 239.

⁶ Susan Margaret Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 173.

Phelps begins her essay by describing the traditional woman ideal as “an enormous dummy.”⁷

She continues by listing the ways women can improve their position:

when women are admitted to their rightful share in the administration of government; when, from the ballot to the highest executive honors and uses, they shall be permitted fairly to represent, in their own characters, the interests of their sex; when the state ceases to expend a dollar more for the education of its boys than of its girls ... when marriage and motherhood no more complete a woman’s mission to the world than marriage and fatherhood complete a man’s.⁸

Phelps concludes by describing the true woman as a “sad sphinx,”⁹ a comparison that will be discussed further in this chapter as the image is also evident in *The Story of Avis*. Another important work is the 1871 novel *The Silent Partner*, in which Phelps revisits factory conditions and the labouring class; protagonists Perley Kelso (the silent partner of the mill) and Sip Garth (factory worker of the mill) reject marriage proposals and instead choose to focus on their careers. Despite Phelps’ extensive literary career, *The Story of Avis* (1877), in which Phelps portrays the life of painter Avis Dobell, is perhaps the most complex and significant of her works.

Avis Dobell is an aspiring painter who loses her artistic power after she marries Philip Ostrander, because she is unable to balance her career with her domestic responsibilities. While Phelps poses the choice between occupation and marriage in most of her novels, *The Story of Avis* is the only one where the protagonist marries. Furthermore, Phelps’ critique of marriage is evident in this novel; Phelps focuses the majority of the novel on Avis’ life after

⁷ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, “The True Woman,” *The Independent* [New York] 12 Oct. 1871:1, rpt in *The Story of Avis* by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1985) 269.

⁸ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, “The True Woman,” *The Independent* [New York] 12 Oct. 1871:1, rpt in *The Story of Avis* by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1985) 271.

⁹ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, “The True Woman,” *The Independent* [New York] 12 Oct. 1871:1, rpt in *The Story of Avis* by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1985) 272.

she marries, and directly addresses the detrimental effects marriage can have on a woman's creativity and self-fulfilment.

At the time of its publication, critics praised Phelps and her novel. According to *The Woman's Journal*,

The Story of Avis, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, is one of the most remarkable books which has this season come to our table. In this story Miss Phelps raises the question more and more asked by women, whether marriage, in the case of a woman is compatible with the pursuit of other strong ruling tastes...The story is told with great power, with artistic skill, and with unflagging interest. The fine word-painting, the subtle analysis, the philosophical discussion, the delineations of character, and the high meaning of the book, will give the story of Avis a permanent place in English literature.¹⁰

Similarly, the *New-York Tribune* asserts, "This is much the longest story Miss Phelps has ever written, and in plot, power, humour, and literary excellence, it will doubtless be unanimously pronounced her best."¹¹ The *Atlantic Monthly* offers a similar reflection:

[*The Story of Avis*] moves to strong admiration and almost equally strong regret. That would be a dull and cold reader indeed who should fail to be impressed by the emotional intensity of the tale, its mental refinement, the truth of the subordinate characters, its frequent humour, and the highly poetic quality of its diction.¹²

The novel also received positive reviews in England; according to *The Morning Post*, "There is a fascination in the whole story which is impossible to resist; and not only are the principal characters admirably drawn, but the subordinate ones are also very good, possessing a

¹⁰ "Literary Notices," *The Woman's Journal* [Boston] 15 Dec. 1877: 400.

¹¹ "New Publications," *New-York Tribune* [New York] 20 Oct. 1877: 6.

¹² "*The Story of Avis* and other novels," *The Atlantic Monthly* [Boston] Apr. 1878: 486.

quaintness and reality which invests them with considerable charm.”¹³ Despite the approval of many newspapers and periodicals, some reviews criticized the novel’s content. For example, London’s *Funny Folks* claims the work is “un-original,”¹⁴ and the *New York Times* asserts, “As a literary work—if any one should regard it in that light—the harm would be undoubted, for nothing could be worse than to lead young people to suppose the style a safe or good one....”¹⁵ Despite these negative reviews, scholarship today recognises the importance of Phelps and her contribution to postbellum fiction. According to Christine Stansell, *The Story of Avis* “is concerned with the conflict between art and womanliness.... and [is] a probing exploration of the possibilities for survival for a woman who tries to preserve her human wholeness.”¹⁶ Michael Startisky discusses how the novel reflects Phelps’ feelings on marriage, and asserts, “artist Avis Dobell accepts [marriage] after her initial refusal, though much to her ultimate regret ... Phelps observes that a married woman’s profession is her husband and that the prospects are limited for a woman simultaneously pursuing a career outside the home and marriage.”¹⁷ Jack H. Wilson focuses on the novel’s bildungsroman narrative, and points out how it “chronicles an emotional and ethical growth that Avis experiences over the five years of her marriage as she searches for her identity as a woman.”¹⁸ Ronna Coffey Privett takes a different approach and explores how the text “argues against the nineteenth-century white, middle-class status quo in terms of what marriage means for an intelligent, ambitious, artistic young woman.”¹⁹ Deborah Barker also views the novel in a different light and discusses the female artist alongside Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860); according to Barker, Phelps represents “one aspect of [the riddle of the sphinx]

¹³ “Literature,” *The Morning Post* [London] 28 Dec. 1877: 3.

¹⁴ “A Rare Bird,” *Funny Folks* [London] 17 Nov. 1877: 156.

¹⁵ “New Publications,” *New York Times* [New York] 15 Oct. 1877: 2.

¹⁶ Stansell 246-7.

¹⁷ Michael Startisky, afterword, *Doctor Zay*, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (New York: Feminist at the City University of New York, 1987) 287.

¹⁸ Jack H. Wilson, “Competing Narratives in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ *The Story of Avis*,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 26.1 (1993): 61.

¹⁹ Ronna Coffey Privett, *A Comprehensive Study of American Writer Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, 1844-1911: Art for Truth's Sake* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003) xi.

by dramatizing the material, domestic and emotional conditions under which a single woman artist struggled.”²⁰ Susan K. Harris’ analysis of the novel is also significant; she points out that the novel addresses two main themes: “the moral and psychological problem of effective nondomestic work for women, and the sexual problem of male dominance, especially within the marriage relation.”²¹ By the end of the novel Phelps attributes Avis’ failure to the oppressive nature of marriage and the consuming domestic (marital and motherly) responsibilities. Yet, she also offers hope by hinting that the next generation of women (Avis’ daughter Wait) will have more opportunities to be successful in their aspirations. Phelps’ attitude towards marriage isn’t entirely negative; rather, she uses the story of Avis to display the challenges women still faced in pursuing self-fulfilment. Although Harris suggests that “nondomestic work comes to be seen as the avenue to genuine self-reliance,” she ignores self-fulfilment as also being a motivation for Avis.²² In this chapter I will use the lens of affective labour to denote and explore Avis’ artistic labour. I will also discuss how Avis’ marriage to Philip Ostrander hinders her artistic passion; housework and motherhood consume Avis, and she eventually abandons her art.

The Story of Avis begins with the epigraph “And all I saw was on the sunny ground/ The flying shadow of an unseen bird.”²³ These lines (specifically the phrase “unseen bird”), in conjunction with the title of the novel, introduce Avis. The word “avis,” or “rara avis,” is the Latin term for “a rare (species of) bird,” and simultaneously “a person of a type seldom encountered; an exceptional person, a paragon.”²⁴ Phelps’ decision to name her protagonist “Avis” is purposeful; it insinuates her uniqueness, and enables the reader to see the relationship between the birds in the novel and Avis. The similes in the first few pages of the

²⁰ Deborah Barker, “The Riddle of the Sphinx: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ *The Story of Avis*,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 9.1 (2008): 56.

²¹ Harris 201.

²² Harris 201-2

²³ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Story of Avis*, ed. Carol Farley Kessler (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1985) 3. All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

novel, “Avis went to it as straight as a bird to a lighthouse on a dark night. She would have beaten herself against the color, like those very birds against the glowing glass....”(6-7), further establish this connection. According to Privett, avis is “a rare bird who is more at home in the wild (in a freer, less rule-bound society) than under cultivation.”²⁵ As such, whenever images of birds appear within the novel, they correlate to Avis’ depiction as a “fairly independent woman, self-sufficient and unconventional.”²⁶ Therefore, it can be inferred that every flying bird depicted in the novel alludes to Avis’ quest for independence, while every wounded or dead bird alludes to her failure.

Phelps establishes Avis’ independence and successful career as an artist from the very outset of the novel. We learn that Avis has just returned from studying in Europe for six years, where she not only “adopted a ‘career’” in art, but even “got into the newspapers” (8) for her work and “peculiar style” (9). The first few chapters outline how Avis develops her artistic talent, and the steps she takes to realise her dream. The reader also learns that Avis’ father, Professor Hegel Dobell, has recently been widowed; as a result, her only maternal relation is Aunt Chloe, who is unsuccessful in trying to teach Avis all the traditional domestic duties. As with Fern’s Ruth, Avis’ disdain for domesticity is evident in the opening pages of the novel:

“Aunt Chloe says it’s unladylike to hate,” said Avis. “If it is, then I’d rather not be a lady. There are other people in the world than ladies. And I hate to make my bed; and I hate, hate, to sew chemises; and I hate, hate, *hate*, to go cooking round the kitchen. It makes a crawling down my back to sew. But the crawling comes from hating: the more I hate, the more I crawl....” (27)

The repetition of “crawling” and “hate” further establish Avis’ aversion to housework. The phrase “the more I crawl,” the act of having to physically move on hands and knees to

²⁵ Privett 172.

²⁶ Privett 172.

perform housework, is also important because it suggests an activity that in Avis' (and Phelps' eyes) further degrades women. Avis is fighting against the true woman ideal, choosing instead the unconventional path of pursuing a career.

Although Avis' aversion to domesticity is evident at the outset, the reader is initially unaware of how different she is from the typical woman figure of the time. This is clarified when Avis reads Elizabeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. The inspiration Avis draws from the text not only gives her the strength to form her own identity, but gives her the courage to centre it in art. As Harris asserts, Phelps uses *Aurora Leigh* and its message to "signal Avis' awakening to her own talents."²⁷ Armed with the knowledge that she too could achieve self-fulfilment, she declares her decision to her father:

"I have decided this morning that I want to be an artist. I want to be educated as an artist, and paint pictures all my life...."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" repeated Professor Dobell. "I can't have you filling your head with any of these womanish apings of a man's affairs, like a monkey playing tunes on a hand organ." (33)

Despite her father's disdain, Avis' resolve is strong. While she understands an education is necessary to expand her knowledge and exercise her artistic skills, her father not only ignores her pleas, but describes them as "womanish apings of a man's affairs." By defining her aspirations as ridiculous, and comparing women to monkeys, he is further asserting his patriarchal power and ideas. As Barker points out, Dobell's assertion is also "indicative of nineteenth-century assumptions about women's evolutionary inferiority to men."²⁸ He further dismisses her aspirations when he states, "Make yourself happy with your paint-box, if you like. That was a very pretty little copy which you made me of Sir William The likeness was really preserved" (33). In response, Avis declares "I do not want to make pretty little

²⁷ Harris 202.

²⁸ Barker 37.

copies.... I want to be thoroughly educated in art” (34). Despite his initial objection, Dobell allows Avis to study art in Florence, believing that she will return and seek marriage like all the “other educated ladies” (34). Yet, it has become clear that Avis’ intention is not to become a mere imitator (as all the other ladies), but an artist, one who creates new work through her own imaginative capacity.

Florence gives Avis the chance to cultivate her talent, develop a “disciplined imagination” (37), and produce pieces of art. Not only is her joy in her art apparent, but it is here that Phelps presents art as a profession, one that requires many hours of persistent work:

She stooped to her task with a stern, ungirlish doggedness.... The self-distrust which had shrunk at the first rebuff of ardour was her preservation now. She abandoned herself to grating drudgeries involved in mastering the *technique* of art with a passion of which it were not discerning not to say that it added to the fire of the artist something of feminine self-abnegation. (37)

The word “task,” and the phrases “mastering the technique” and “grating drudgeries,” all denote hard, gruelling, labour. Avis spends hours toiling and exercising her artistic skills. Like the other labours of the arts discussed in previous chapters (i.e. singing in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, writing in the novels of Gissing, Sinclair, and Fern, to name a few) Avis’ affective labour through painting is presented as a way for her to attain self-fulfilment. The “passion” she feels as she completes works of art is in fact due to her mental, emotional, and creative labours. This is apparent even more in the following passage:

“I am so glad to be at work!” she said,—“so gravely, greatly glad!”

She said this to herself. It was necessary to say something. She did not remember to have worked so excitedly before. She thrilled to her task as the violet thrilled to the sun. Never had she seemed to conceive or to construct, with her imagination so recipient and docile to her inspirations. Never had she

seemed before to be in such harmony with the infinite growing and yearning
of Nature. (54)

Phelps uses the simile, “she thrilled to her task as the violet thrilled to the sun,” to once again solidify the connection between Avis and nature. What Avis achieves through painting is being compared to the nourishment a flower receives from light. Through this comparison Phelps is asserting that art is necessary for Avis’ survival and growth. The terms “conceive” and “construct” should also be noted, in that they both support the idea that Avis is creating her own works of art rather than copying; through affective labour, and by utilizing her “imagination,” she produces these pieces. The phrase “docile to her inspirations” is also revealing in that it suggests Avis is willingly submissive to her creative genius. Although her “creative moods were always those of tense vision” (83), leaving her physically exhausted by the end of the day, she is motivated to attain self-fulfilment.

Unfortunately, as with Phelps’ other protagonists, Avis is obstructed from continuing her career when she has to make a choice between being a wife and being an artist. Barker asserts, “Phelps demonstrates that the potential danger to society lies not in the contribution of women’s original production; rather, it is the male gaze that threatens to undermine women’s potential contribution by transforming women from subjects into objects.”²⁹ From the moment Philip Ostrander confesses his love and proposes marriage, Avis struggles to defend her independence and maintain her profession. Initially, Avis explains to Ostrander why she cannot accept his marriage proposal: “‘Success—for a woman—means absolute surrender, in whatever direction. Whether she paints a picture, or loves a man, there is no division of labour possible in her economy’” (69). When it appears that he doesn’t understand her reasoning, she concludes with a simple declaration: “‘Marriage,’ said Avis, not assertantly, but only sadly, as if she were but recognizing some dreary, universal truth, like

²⁹ Barker 41.

that of sin, or misery, or death, ‘is a profession to a woman. And I have my work; I have my work!’” (71). In the first passage, an allusion to Adam Smith,³⁰ and in part to Karl Marx,³¹ is evident in the phrase “division of labour.” Simply, under capitalism, a division of labour is necessary for increased production. By using this phrase, Phelps is demonstrating that women are unable to divide attention between family and career; it is inevitable that one area of a woman’s life will suffer if they attempt to do both. A further comparison is drawn when Avis deems marriage “a profession;” even though the domestic responsibilities that come with wifehood and motherhood are unpaid, they are labour intensive and consuming. Knowing the complications marriage will bring, Avis thus resolves to “never yield, like other women” (67), and remain single. Yet, when Ostrander returns from the Civil War wounded, Avis succumbs to his advances, eager to believe that she can be both wife and artist.

In Phelps’ previous work, *The Gates Ajar*, the Civil War had been central to the plot. Similarly, in *The Story of Avis*, the war marks the beginning of Avis’ struggles. According to Karen Tracey,

The Civil War, recast into the novel *Avis*, represents the violent male world in which Avis must be a woman and an artist, but war also operates as a double metaphor in her personal life, representing both the battle between Avis and Philip Ostrander and Avis’ internal conflict when struggling against her attraction to him.³²

Avis has “two natures” (107) in her that distinctly oppose each other: one that represents the sacrifices she will have to make in order to submit to the true woman ideal, and the other, the success she will achieve through her art. In addition to this “internal conflict,” there is a larger sense of the war emulated through a battle of the sexes. This is more than evident in

³⁰ See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Methuen, 1950).

³¹ See Karl Marx, *Capital: An Abridged Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

³² Karen Tracey, *Plots and Proposals: American Women’s Fiction, 1850-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 153-4.

the language Phelps uses to demonstrate the interaction between Avis and Ostrander. Words such as “yield” (67) and “surrender” (69) pervade the text. Moreover, Phelps repeats the idea that Ostrander sees marriage as winning, and even dominating, Avis. Initially Ostrander views Avis as a woman who is not “too easily won” (72); after their engagement, he again views her as “not yet won” (120); and finally, when they marry, it is said that “she might withdraw herself as she would, or grieve over her sweet, lost liberty as she must; she was his” (113). Again the idea of women serving as commodities is addressed. Phelps illustrates this further when Avis tears off her “betrothal ring” (120); Avis may have agreed to the marriage out of pity, but her apprehension is indicated by her reluctance in wearing the ring, the symbol of her confinement.

While the engagement marks Avis’ defeat of the battle of the sexes, she is still determined to resolve her inner struggle by attempting to balance her art with her domestic responsibilities. Phelps demonstrates how the demands of domesticity can overwhelm any woman through the narrator:

Women understand—only women altogether—what a dreary will-o-the-wisp is this old, common, I had almost said commonplace, experience, “When the fall sewing is done,” “When the baby can walk,” “When the house-cleaning is over,” “When the company has gone,” “When we have got through with the whooping-cough,” “When I am a little stronger,” then I will write the poem, or learn the language, or study the great charity, or master the symphony; then I will act, dare, dream, become. Merciful is the fate that hides from any soul the prophecy of its still-born aspirations. (149)

The distinction between “common” and commonplace” is purposeful; by using “commonplace” to describe this tendency, a negative connotation is apparent. Phelps also uses anaphora, “when... then..., or...” to highlight the drudgery of the dull and uninteresting

nature of these duties. Although the verbs “act,” “dare,” “dream,” “become,” coincide with Avis’ will to pursue her career, she realizes that they are “still-born aspirations;” she now has too many responsibilities, and her goals are impossible to reach. The passage is also striking in that it distinguishes the two very different kinds of affective labour: the labour of a wife and mother, and that of an artist seeking self-fulfilment. Avis may hope to do both, but it is clear that her affective labour of the arts metamorphoses into one of housework and maternal care.

After three years of marriage, Avis’ failure in maintaining her career is apparent. With the birth of her children, the loss of her husband’s job and the endless household responsibilities, she is unable to produce any more unique and inspirational pieces. This is established by the conversation Avis has with her old teacher, Frederick Maynard:

“You are to make no more portraits, you understand,” said Frederick Maynard, stumbling over Van, and narrowly escaping sitting on the baby as he went out. “You’ll never be a portrait-painter. You must create: you cannot copy. That is what we lack in this country. We have no imagination. The sphinx is a creation. I told Groupil so when I took it on. He bowed politely. And now he comes asking for a photograph! You—*you!*—life is before you now....”

“Life is behind me too,” she said gently. “It was before my marriage that I painted the sphinx. Don’t be too much disappointed in me, if there are never any more pictures. Oh, I shall try! But I do not hope—do not think. We all have our lives to bear....” (205-6)

There are two important points made in these passages: firstly, the idea that Avis’ imagination is crucial to her creations (again reiterating that her art is possible through her affective labour), and secondly, that she has produced only one great painting, that of the

sphinx. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* and Greek Mythology, the sphinx was “a hybrid monster, usually described as having the head of a woman and the (winged) body of a lion, which infested Thebes until the riddle it propounded was solved by Oedipus.”³³ However, the term can also refer to “a thing or subject of a mysterious or inscrutable nature.”³⁴ However, for Phelps, and Avis, the riddle of the sphinx is how to be both a woman (wife and mother) and an artist. According to Anne E. Boyd, “the Sphinx represents the dilemma of the woman artist, ‘[t]he riddle of ages’ (83): how to discover the source of ancient, mysterious, divine inspiration, or romantic genius, when one is also a woman.”³⁵ Showalter offers a similar deduction and asserts that for Phelps, the sphinx is “a mute monster [who] stands for the enigmatic nature of the female genius.”³⁶ As Tracey points out, “by producing the painting of the sphinx, Avis is trying to reconcile her warring natures by giving the sphinx a voice;”³⁷ yet, by having to complete the painting out of monetary necessity, rather than creative inspiration, the meaning of the sphinx is ultimately altered. The final version of the painting depicts an “Arab child looking at the sphinx with his finger on his lips, swearing her to silence....” (205); by hastily finishing the painting to pay their debts, Avis “struck the great sphinx dumb” (205). Linda Huf argues, “the Arab child then is an emblem of children everywhere—of both toddlers and tutors—who prevent women from realizing their potential.”³⁸ Similarly, the mute sphinx represents what happens to women when they marry: they lose their selfhood, their self-expression and personal voice.

Despite having sold her painting, and having achieved great success with it, Avis no longer has the energy and inspiration to devote to her art: “She was stunned to find how her

³³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

³⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

³⁵ Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004) 101.

³⁶ Showalter 205.

³⁷ Tracey 159.

³⁸ Linda Huf, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature* (New York: F. Ungar Publications, 1983) 47.

aspirations had emaciated during her married life. Household care had fed upon it like a disease” (206). When her family life continues to disintegrate (her son and husband die and her money troubles continue), she decides to teach art instead, acknowledging that her inspiration for art has gone. This is made evident when Avis tells her father:

“It is of no use,” said Avis wearily, “my pictures come back upon my hands. Nobody wants them—now. They tell that my style is gone. Groupil says I work as if I had a rheumatic hand—as if my fingers were stiff. It is true my hand has been a little clumsy since Van—but stiffness runs deeper than fingers, father. Never mind; don’t mind. We’ve given it up—Wait and I; haven’t we, Wait?” (244)

Avis no longer has the tenacity, motivation and creative genius to paint; she accepts her failure and instead focuses her attention on her daughter, Waitstill. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Alcott’s Christie is able to attain self-fulfilment through orating due to her husband’s passing. Although one might expect Avis to be able to do the same with her art when she becomes a widow, Phelps prevents this from happening because, as Boyd points out, “a happy ending would undercut the seriousness of her warning to her female readers.”³⁹ Instead, Phelps reveals that Ostrander, and in turn marriage, has “eaten out the core of [Avis’] life, left her a riddled, withered thing, spent and rent, wasted by the autocracy of a love as imperious as her own nature, and as deathless as her own soul” (244).

Despite the demise of Avis’ selfhood, Phelps does offer some hope for the women of the future. At the close of the novel, Phelps, under the narrator’s guise, argues what steps need to be taken for a woman to attain self-fulfilment:

We have been told that it takes three generations to make a gentleman: we may believe that it will take as much, or more, to make A WOMAN. A being

³⁹ Boyd 104.

of radiant physique; the heiress of ancestral health on the maternal side; a creature forever more of nerve than of muscle, and therefore trained to the energy of the muscle and the repose of the nerve; physically educated by mothers of her own fibre and by physicians of her own sex,—such a woman alone is fitted to acquire the drilled brain, the calmed imagination, and sustained aim, which constitute intellectual command. (246)

As Privett argues, *The Story of Avis* is a novel “which artistically pleas for women’s rights to self-fulfilment and self-support through education and career.”⁴⁰ The novel also demonstrates that women do have the potential to attain success in artistic endeavours through affective labour. Although Phelps doesn’t provide Avis with the continuation of her career, it is implied that Avis will prepare Wait with the tools necessary to attain her own selfhood in the future.

The didactic novel of the 1870s distanced itself from domestic ideology and simultaneously portrayed women as challenging marriage and instead seeking professional opportunities. According to Harris, “by the mid-1870s, the passive, self-abnegating female of early didactic novels [Harris uses Susannah Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and Catherine Sedgwick’s *A New-England Tale* (1822) as examples] had been transformed into an active, self-possessed, and politically conscious woman.”⁴¹ During the 1880s and 1890s, when the New Woman began to emerge, novels once again altered in form and subject matter. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asserts, “the New Woman, rejecting conventional female roles and asserting their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded to bourgeois men.”⁴² As with British literature, New Woman writers criticised True Woman ideology and even displayed their radical

⁴⁰ Privett 181.

⁴¹ Harris 201.

⁴² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 176.

attitudes towards sexuality in their novels; while Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and George Egerton, to name a few, were leaders of New Woman fiction in Britain, Sarah Orne Jewett, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Willa Cather dominated American fiction. In the next, and final chapter on nineteenth-century fiction, I will discuss one such work that explores themes of New Woman fiction.

Chapter Eight: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Among late nineteenth-century women writers, Kate Chopin has acquired immense popularity, primarily because her work *The Awakening* (1899) was rediscovered and reappraised in the late 1950s. Since then, Chopin's work has been the focus of many literary critics. Kenneth Eble, Daniel S. Rankin, Per Seyersted and Emily Toth are among the first who published scholarship on her life and works.¹ Although *The Awakening* has since been acknowledged as worthy of inclusion in the literary canon, and despite it being a novella and not a novel, it is included in my dissertation because it remains one of the most influential works of the late nineteenth century. Rather than review the plethora of biographical information, and revisit Chopin's many publications (stories, poetry, novels), this chapter will closely look at *The Awakening* through the lens of affective labour. My analysis will argue that Edna Pontellier's affective labour, through painting especially, is directed towards self-fulfilment, and financial, and as social independence; her suicide then represents her final act towards achieving freedom, after she realises she can never truly be autonomous.

Written at the time when New Woman fiction was popular in both America and Britain, *The Awakening* certainly appears to be influenced by some of the ideas that the movement voiced. And yet, it has also been linked to the works of "Local Colour," or regional writers, in the way that Chopin focuses on the New Orleans region and its customs. Set in New Orleans, and the Grand Isle, *The Awakening* tells the story of Edna Pontellier's awakening; realizing that her husband and children fail to fulfil her emotionally as well as sexually, she sets off to achieve financial and social independence through self-fulfilment. Like many New Woman fiction protagonists,² Edna immerses herself in the arts; she not only

¹ See Kenneth Eble, "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," *Western Humanities Review* 10 (1956): 261-9. Daniel S. Rankin, *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932). Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969); Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin* (New York: William Morrow, 1990).

² For a more thorough account of New Woman fiction revisit chapter four.

thoroughly enjoys music and the way it moves her emotionally, but she begins painting as a way to express herself freely.

The Awakening incited many negative reviews at the time of its publication; many attacked the subject matter, the adulterous protagonist, and Chopin herself for writing such a risqué novel. According to the *Sunday Journal*, “Miss Kate Chopin is another clever woman, but she has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing *The Awakening*. The purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication.”³ Similarly, the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* asserts, “Certainly there is throughout the story an undercurrent of sympathy for Edna, and nowhere a single note of censure of her totally unjustifiable conduct.”⁴ Others take a more drastic approach; the reviewer of the *Public Opinion* proclaims, “If the author had secured our sympathy for this unpleasant person it would not have been a small victory, but we are well satisfied when Mrs. Pontellier deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the gulf.”⁵ Finally, according to *The Sun*,

Kate Chopin ... has, we regret to see, taken herself seriously, and made a study of a woman’s yielding without any excuse of passion to the impulse of her physical senses. Like other women who rush into fields that had better be left untrodden, the author tells some things more plainly than she probably imagines, which adds to the unpleasantness of a story repulsive enough in itself.⁶

Despite the overwhelmingly unfavourable reviews, some periodicals commended the novella. For example, the *New York Times* asserts, “The author has a clever way of managing a difficult subject, and wisely tempers the emotional elements found in the situation. Such is the cleverness in the handling of the story that you feel pity for the most unfortunate of her

³ “Books of the Week,” *Sunday Journal* [Providence] 4 Jun. 1899: 15.

⁴ “New Publications,” *Times-Democrat* [New Orleans] Jun. 1899: 15.

⁵ “Book Reviews,” *Public Opinion* 22 Jun. 1899: 794.

⁶ “New Books,” *The Sun* [New York] 20 May 1899: 7.

sex.”⁷ Although critics objected to the novella at the time of its publication, Chopin’s contribution has since been appreciated, and *The Awakening* is even considered a masterpiece. Today scholarship continues to offer many interpretations of the novella and Edna’s sexual awakening.⁸ Some see her suicide as a culmination of her regression towards childhood,⁹ while most comment on the ambiguous ending. According to Mary E. Papke, Edna’s suicide is a way to finally attain freedom: “Edna transcends despair, if only by embracing death.”¹⁰ Susan K. Harris offers a similar view and asserts, “Edna ... not understanding how to manifest herself outside of the sexually delineated sphere, escapes a future that she sees as only further enslaving her.”¹¹ Other critics focus on Edna’s efforts to attain self-fulfilment. For Dorothy H. Jacobs, the most important theme of *The Awakening* is in fact “painful self-recognition,”¹² and Anne Goodwyn Jones maintains that Edna Pontellier’s “real commitment is to self-discovery.”¹³ Although critics have offered many insightful evaluations of the novella, I will propose a different analysis by looking at the work through the lens of affective labour. Edna commits suicide for two reasons: firstly, because her affective labour fails to bring her self-fulfilment as well as autonomy, and secondly, because she realizes she will never fully embody the two distinct womanly positions society places before her, neither the artist, nor the mother-wife.

⁷ “100 Books for Summer Reading: A Select and Classified List Drawn from the Books of the Past Twelve Months,” *New York Times* [New York] 24 Jun. 1899: 408.

⁸ For a comprehensive summary of scholarship on *The Awakening*, look at Sue Asbee’s essays “*The Awakening*: Identities” and “*The Awakening*: Contexts,” in Dennis Walder, ed, *The Nineteenth-Century Novel* (London: Routledge 2001).

⁹ See for example, James H. Justus, “The Unawakening of Edna Pontellier,” *The Southern Literary Journal* (1978): 107-22, and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros: Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” *American Quarterly* 25.4 (1973): 449-71.

¹⁰ Mary E. Papke, *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton* (New York: Greenwood, 1990) 87.

¹¹ Susan K. Harris, *19th-century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 206.

¹² Dorothy H. Jacobs, “*The Awakening*: A Recognition of Confinement,” *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*, eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara DeSaussure Davis (Louisiana: Louisiana State UP, 1992) 80.

¹³ Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South 1859-1936* (Louisiana: Louisiana State UP, 1981) 154.

At the outset, Chopin introduces the protagonist as Leonce Pontellier's possession, "his wife, Mrs. Pontellier."¹⁴ This idea that Edna represents a commodity is made explicit when she and Robert Lebrun walk up from the beach. Mr. Pontellier scolds his wife and scrutinizes her physical appearance: "'You are burnt beyond recognition,' he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (3). In accordance with Irigaray's theory on women's position in the marriage market, Edna functions as an "object,"¹⁵ one that Mr. Pontellier has acquired and now owns; her sustained value has temporarily lowered due to her sunburnt complexion, and thus, his reaction is justified. Her function as a commodity also defines her as submissive; Edna then "silently reach[es] out to him" (3) for her rings and replaces them on her fingers, without a word of resistance.

The opening lines also set the tone for the novella: a caged parrot sings "*Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!*" while a caged mocking-bird "whistil[es] his fluty notes ... with maddening persistence" (1). According to Sandra Gilbert, "these birds together prefigure both Edna's restlessness and her irony, her awaking desire for freedom and her sardonic sense that freedom may ultimately be meaningless...."¹⁶ In fact, the rings, the caged birds, the portrayal of Edna as a commodity, and her inability to fulfil her role as a doting mother, all foreshadow an ominous ending. Thus, the plot and the conflict of the story are established within the first few pages: Edna feels trapped in her role of wife and mother, and will spend the rest of her life transgressing social boundaries and conventions, to attain freedom and self-fulfilment.

In a subsequent scene, Chopin makes the reader aware of Edna's discontent: "An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her

¹⁴ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Rachel Adams (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 2003). All future references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One* (New York: Cornell UP, 1985) 189.

¹⁶ Sandra Gilbert, "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire," *The Kenyon Review* 5.3 (1983): 48.

consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood" (8).

The language in this passage, "indescribable," "vague," "mist," and "unfamiliar," supports the idea of the unknown. The similes, "like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day," enhance Edna's suffering; the haze, or "shadow" that is passing across, is likened to the "oppression" overcoming her soul. Although Edna doesn't recognize what is causing her sadness just yet, there is an overall tone of melancholy and dissatisfaction in her position. As she begins to undergo an awakening, it becomes clear that her inability to attain self-fulfilment is responsible for her despondency.

In the previous chapters, domestic labour, namely housework and childrearing, has been considered when discussing women's affective labours. The affective labours of Alcott's Christie Devon, as well as, those of Gaskell's Ruth Hilton and Mary Barton, to name a few, include caring for family members and taking part in household management and chores. Although in many of the works examined the protagonists take part in some kind of domestic affective labour, Edna does not; she rejects all maternal and household responsibilities in order to engage in the labour of the arts. Early on Mr. Pontellier complains that Edna "fail[s] in her duty towards her children" (3), mismanages the staff of the house, and most importantly, does not resemble the other women in Grand Isle:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (10)

In this passage, Chopin portrays these women as embodying the angel in the house, the feminine ideal advising women to be obedient wives and nurturing mothers. By doing so, Chopin again conveys women's total oppression. Once more, the images of birds are present through the terms "fluttering," "wings," and "brood;" although these women aren't caged literally, they are compelled to give up their "individuality" or freedom, under the will of God, and act as angels. According to Garnet Ayers Batinovich, "Chopin needed Edna to show the frustrations of married Victorian women, whose lives were dictated by the Church and whose societal roles were determined by Scripture."¹⁷ Edna's rejection of the motherly role is her first step in rebelling against constraints.

Chopin also sets up a comparison between the two very different types of women. She creates Adele Ratignolle as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (10), and juxtaposes this ideal with the figure of Mademoiselle Reisz, the pianist who leads a solitary life and rejects all societal conventions. Although Edna prefers painting to domestic duties, she still believes in love and sexuality, making it difficult to distinguish which woman she identifies with more fully. *The Awakening*, then, is a novella that also illustrates the quest of a woman to find where she belongs; her suicide at the end is a result of Edna's failure to achieve self-fulfilment through her affective labour, and her inability to find a space to occupy. I will first examine Edna's affective labour through painting, and then address the types of women Chopin represents through Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz.

Edna's affective labour is first brought to light at the Grand Isle when she begins to sketch Adele's portrait:

Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.

¹⁷ Garnet Ayers Batinovich, "Storming the Cathedral: The Antireligious Subtext in Kate Chopin's Works," *Kate Chopin in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Essays*, ed. Heather Ostman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 84.

She had long wished to try herself on Madame Ratignolle. Never had that lady seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color.

Robert crossed over and seated himself upon the step below Mrs. Pontellier, that he might watch her work. She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude....

The picture completed bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle. She was greatly disappointed to find that it did not look like her. But it was a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying.

Mrs. Pontellier evidently did not think so. After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands. (15)

Although Edna initially paints casually, the fulfilment and pleasure she feels when doing so drive her to consider her hobby in a more serious manner. In addition, painting is depicted as being a kind of labour through the terms “employment” and “work.” As previously stated, affective labour includes labours of the arts, because emotional, intellectual and creative labour is involved. Edna may not be pleased with the painting she has created in this instance, but it becomes clear that as she cultivates her artistic talent, her art evolves as well. Scholars such as Deborah E. Barker and Elaine Showalter assert that Edna’s painting of Adele begins her awakening. Yet, it is not because Adele “belatedly initiates Edna into the world of female love,”¹⁸ nor because she conceives “Adele as a Madonna.”¹⁹ Rather, Edna’s soul awakens as

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter, “Tradition and Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book,” *New Essays on The Awakening*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 45.

¹⁹ Deborah E. Barker, “The Awakening of Female Artistry,” *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*, eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara DeSaussure Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992) 64.

she utilizes her “natural aptitude” and artistic skills to express her own thoughts and desires. Her affective labour enables her to “realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (17). From this point forward Edna no longer defines herself as Mr. Pontellier’s wife, nor as the mother of their children, but as her own entity, separate from marriage and societal conventions. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff asserts, Edna’s painting “utilizes in an effective way her habit of transforming the act of observing the external world into an act of incorporation: to some extent the artist must use the world in this way, incorporating it and transforming it in the act of artistic creation.”²⁰ Affective labour through art gives Edna the power to express herself, produce the world as she sees it, and most importantly, achieve self-fulfilment.

Upon her return to New Orleans, Edna tries to continue her affective labour, even seeking support and encouragement from her friends:

“Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day,” said Edna with a smile when they were seated. She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them. “I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something. What do you think of them? Do you think it worth while to take it up again and study some more? I might study for a while with Laidpore.”

She knew that Madame Ratignolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had not alone decided, but determined; but she sought the words of praise and encouragement that would help her to put heart into her venture.

“Your talent is immense, dear!”

“Nonsense!” protested Edna, well pleased.

²⁰ Wolff 465.

“Immense, I tell you,” persisted Madame Ratignolle, surveying the sketches one by one, at close range, then holding them at arm's length, narrowing her eyes, and dropping her head on one side. “Surely, this Bavarian peasant is worthy of framing; and this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one.”

Edna could not control a feeling which bordered upon complacency at her friend's praise, even realizing, as she did, its true worth. (74)

Although Adele is not an expert in art, nor does she have the knowledge necessary to evaluate it, Edna still turns to her for praise. According to Doris Davis, “to a certain extent [Edna] considers a positive assessment of her painting as a reflection of her self-worth.”²¹ Moreover, her art also symbolizes her potential for social and economic independence. This is evident in the language of the passages. Terms such as “work,” “worth,” “valueless,” “venture,” and “worthy” all suggest that Edna’s art may be seen as a profession, one that will give her financial independence.

Edna resolves to succeed in her endeavour, even if it means disregarding her domestic and motherly responsibilities, and instead focusing on her art more:

She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household en bonne menagere, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.

Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of

²¹ Doris Davis, “*The Awakening: The Economics of Tension*,” *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*, eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara DeSaussure Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992) 149.

conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

“It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family.”

“I feel like painting,” answered Edna. “Perhaps I shan't always feel like it.”

“Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter.”

“She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go.” (76)

Edna is aware that her roles of wife and mother are keeping her from achieving self-fulfilment and most importantly sexual, social and economic freedom. She is determined to paint and so openly rejects social expectations, and rebels against the social codes that deem her Mr. Pontellier's possession.

Once again, a comparison between Edna and Adele is being made; Mr. Pontellier expects Edna to embody the same ideals as Adele, and even to practice art as she does. As Elaine Showalter asserts, “women's art, as Adele presents it, is social, pleasant, and undemanding. It does not conflict with her duties as a wife and mother, and can even be seen to enhance them.”²² Although Edna understands that by conventional standards a woman's sole objective is to provide for her husband and children, she wants to go further with her art,

²² Showalter 45.

and cultivate her own personal desires. This need is what leads her to identify more with Mademoiselle Reisz, than Adele.

Chopin introduces Reisz as a “disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others” (33). Although Chopin’s description is not sympathetic towards Reisz’s character, it is through her that she portrays an independent woman, one that Edna hopes to emulate. In the Grand Isle when Edna has the pleasure of listening to Reisz play a Chopin prelude, Edna responds:

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth.

She waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her. (34-5)

No longer “evoking pictures in her mind” (34) as she does when Adele plays, Edna can feel the music stimulating her soul. Here Chopin personifies “passions” by saying they lash and sway Edna’s being. The personification, and the simile comparing the “passions” she feels to the sea’s “waves,” make the images extremely vivid, and allow the reader to imagine the form of the wave taking over Edna’s soul. Although Edna’s awakening has allowed her to be more open to various experiences, it is Reisz’s music that really affects her soul. Unlike

Adele who plays music solely to entertain, Reisz uses music to express herself, cultivate her talent, and most importantly, to support herself. This distinction is purposeful. Chopin uses the two different womanly figures to portray two very different kinds of women who existed at the turn of the century; Adele embodies the ideal wife and mother, and Mademoiselle Reisz embodies an exaggerated, desexualized version of the New Woman. As Edna distances herself from Adele, she is attracted more and more to Reisz's lifestyle. Yet, according to Ivy Schweitzer, "in her pursuit of selfhood which is not defined by the self-censorship and non-development of the 'mother-woman,' Edna is both drawn to Mademoiselle Reisz and repulsed by her"²³ Although Reisz's autonomy appeals to Edna, her sexuality and love for Robert (which I will discuss only briefly in this chapter) make it difficult for her to decide which space to occupy. Her indecision and failure to achieve independence through affective labour ultimately compel her to commit suicide.

Edna continues to paint feverishly, yet, she is unhappy with her creations: "She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree" (77). Needing guidance and support for her endeavour, she turns to Reisz:

[Reisz] "But you have told me nothing of yourself. What are you doing?"

"Painting!" laughed Edna. "I am becoming an artist. Think of it!"

"Ah! an artist! You have pretensions, Madame."

"Why pretensions? Do you think I could not become an artist?"

"I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul."

²³ Ivy Schweitzer, "Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," *boundary 2* 17.1 (1990): 170.

“What do you mean by the courageous soul?”

“Courageous, ma foi! The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies.” (85)

It is here that Edna outwardly expresses her desire to follow art as a serious career. According to Papke, “Edna discovers through [Mademoiselle Reisz] the two paths from which she must choose: one is to surrender herself to romance with Robert and by that act to move away from self-fulfilment; the other is to rebel completely, following Reisz’s example, to give up body and soul to the new life.”²⁴ Reisz tells Edna that she must possess the “courageous soul ... that dares and defies” if she truly wants to become an artist; she is suggesting that Edna must have the drive and bravery to reject everything (her marriage, her children, societal expectations) to attain a successful career and autonomy. Moreover, Edna will have to cultivate her innate artistic and creative genius through affective labour to produce strong works of art.

Determined to succeed in her endeavour, Edna resolves to relinquish all ties from her husband’s power by leaving her house, and renting a “little four-room house around the corner” (106). In addition to wanting financial independence from her husband, she also wants freedom from any motherly obligations; thus she leaves her children with her in-laws. She shares her plans with Reisz:

“The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?”

“They are your husband's,” returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

“Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am

²⁴ Papke 81.

beginning to sell my sketches. Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence.” (107)

Edna hopes to achieve financial independence by producing and selling her paintings. Yet, it is doubtful that her paintings will ever be able to produce enough capital for her to live on (and her gambling winnings are only a temporary income). Moreover, even if she does attain a successful career and economic independence, she will still be imprisoned by her marriage to Mr. Pontellier.

Edna’s marriage poses a financial problem, but also restricts her sexuality. Although Edna’s infatuation with Robert hasn’t been examined, it is important to consider his role in her awakening. Edna’s flirtations with Robert in the Grand Isle, and her subsequent, albeit brief, affair with Alcee Arobin, have no consequences because she still is bound to Mr. Pontellier by marriage. However, if she were to attain a divorce and subsequently marry Robert, she will not only be ostracized by society, but will again become a man’s possession. Thus, when Robert suggests she divorces Mr. Pontellier so that they can be together legally, Edna responds by asserting her independence:

“You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, ‘Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,’ I should laugh at you both.” (145)

It is clear that Edna does not want to be anyone's commodity, even if it is to the man she loves. It is at this instance that Edna perceives reality; she will never be able to maintain her freedom and attain self-fulfilment while she is married, and yet, she will be unable to reject love and sexuality for independence.

Edna's suicide at the end of the novel is a culmination of frustrations and an inability to define herself according to either role. As Susan K. Harris points out, Edna's "suicide is a means of 'eluding'—frustrating—forces, including herself, that insist on defining her as mother, lover, or wife."²⁵ This is evident in the closing passages where she thinks of Robert and her children as she prepares to go into the sea:

Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach.

The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

²⁵ Harris 206.

Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her. (154)

Depressed and discontent with the realisation that she will never have everything she desires, Edna returns to Grand Isle where she first underwent her awakening. Edna's children now symbolise adversaries who "overcome," and "overpower" her, obstructing her soul from ever achieving fulfilment. According to Paula A. Treichler, "to live as the creator and nurturer of new 'little lives' perverts the self; to live alone and for herself alone, as Mademoiselle Reisz does, is for Edna impossible."²⁶

In the beginning of the novel, Chopin describes Edna's first experience with the sea as follows: "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (18). Chopin's repetition of the exact phrase, as evident in the aforementioned passages, illustrates how vivid Edna's relationship to the sea is; she welcomes the sea's ability to speak directly to her soul, and appreciates the freedom in being able to "wander in abysses of solitude" (154). There is also a repetition of the images of birds. Although the bird isn't caged literally, it does have a broken wing which prevents it from flying freely. Its plunge in the sea foreshadows Edna's fate: she too will plunge into the sea, but unlike the bird, she will do it willingly.

²⁶ Paula A. Treichler, "The Construction of Ambiguity in *The Awakening*: A Linguistic Analysis." *Kate Chopin: The Awakening*, ed. Nancy A. Walker (Boston: Bedford, 2000) 370.

It is also important to address the symbolism in Edna's removal of her clothes, and the disjointed pictures of her children, her husband, her family, her friends and her childhood that come to her as she is swallowed by the sea. To Edna, the bathing suit represents a product of society and its constraints; likewise, the hallucinations represent the oppressive nature of her social relations. Edna knows that she will always be identified as a commodity—as Mrs. Pontellier; thus, her decision to walk into the sea represents her final effort in shedding all physical and mental representations of the society and distancing herself from constraints. The end of *The Awakening* then is not a punishment for Chopin's protagonist, but a way for Edna finally to have a space of her own to occupy, even if it is in death.

Even at the turn of the century, a period in which one might expect significant improvement in the lives of women, there are still setbacks. Although *The Awakening* isn't necessarily a reassuring narrative, it does demonstrate the struggles women continued to face when trying to distance themselves from the figure of the True Woman, and proclaim their own independence. The analysis of the text through the lens of affective labour illuminates Edna's efforts, and demonstrates that she has actively been trying to attain autonomy. Painting not only gives Edna a chance at financial independence, but allows her freely to express her creativity and emotions in a way that is socially acceptable. By the end of the novella Edna has achieved self-discovery; she has been able “to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (17).

Chapter Nine: Mary Hunter Austin's *A Woman of Genius*, Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*

In the previous chapters I have examined novels written by women that feature the woman artist. Fanny Fern's Ruth Hall wants to be a writer, Louisa May Alcott's Christie Devon aspires to be an orator for the women's movement (among other vocations), and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' Avis Dobell have ambitions to be painters. By analysing these novels through the lens of affective labour, I have demonstrated how important these forms of work were to women who sought self-fulfilment and financial independence. At the turn of the century, women writers continued to use the figure of the female artist in their works. However, in these novels, the protagonists are portrayed as achieving success in their chosen professions. Edith Wharton's Margaret Aubyn in *The Touchstone* (1900) is a successful novelist, Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie* (1900) realizes her dream and becomes a famous actress, and Anne Douglas Sedgwick's Mercedes Okraska in *Tante* (1911) is a renowned pianist. This chapter will include a discussion of two twentieth-century novels that celebrate the woman artist: Mary Hunter Austin's *A Woman of Genius* (1912) and Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915). Both novels focus on the artistic development of the protagonists; in *A Woman of Genius* Olivia Lattimore finds self-fulfilment on the stage and in *The Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronberg achieves musical acclaim through singing. In addition to these works, I will also examine Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), which at first glance may appear to be at a distance from the female artist tradition. Yet, I suggest that Lily Bart's efforts in attaining marriage for financial security have certain artistic qualities. Moreover, her demise illustrates how precarious the struggle for independence was for women, despite the significant advances in art, education, politics, and the labour market in the twentieth century.

Edith Wharton was a prolific writer of the twentieth century. In addition to writing over twenty novels and novellas (apart from the other kinds of works she published in her career), she was the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize (for *The Age of Innocence* in 1921), and was even nominated for a Nobel Prize. Her impact on the literary marketplace is evident in the plethora of scholarly works written on her life and literary career, and through the numerous films that have been based on her novels. Furthermore, she is one of the few women writers to have a place in the literary canon of American fiction. For this reason, rather than revisit biographical information, and review Wharton's many publications, I will focus my attention solely on *The House of Mirth*.

Published in 1905 in serial form for *Scribner's Magazine*, *The House of Mirth* quickly gained popularity and became a best-seller. Despite its great commercial success, the novel received mixed reviews due to its controversial subject matter; critics and readers were quick to debate Wharton's accuracy in portraying the upper class, and to question the overall morality of the novel. Nevertheless, Wharton's literary style and the quality of her writing did receive praise in many of the periodicals of her time. For the *Outlook*, the novel is a "piece of expert workmanship;"¹ the review concludes with the claim that "Mrs. Wharton knows at first hand the world she describes, and her story is free from those exaggerations, misplaced values, and happy-go-lucky descriptions of society life which make the great majority of so-called society novels cheap imitations."² The *New York Tribune* also praises Wharton's portrayal of "fashionable life," and defines the novel as "really powerful and brilliant."³ The novel was commended overseas as well. The *Times Literary Supplement* in London describes

¹ "A Notable Novel," *Outlook* [New York] 21 Oct. 1905: 404-6, rpt. in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, eds. Kristin O. Lauer, Margaret P. Murray, and James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 110.

² "A Notable Novel," *Outlook* [New York] 21 Oct. 1905: 404-6, rpt. in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, eds. Kristin O. Lauer, Margaret P. Murray, and James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 111.

³ "Dust and Ashes—American Fashionable Life in a New Novel by Mrs. Wharton," *New York Tribune* [New York] 14 Oct. 1905: 8.

the novel as “an exceptional book,”⁴ while the *Spectator* offers a similar assertion and claims that “the story is so closely knit, so logically carried out, that one cannot but acquiesce in its inevitableness, and admire the skill with which Mrs. Wharton has contrived to reconcile her readers to a conclusion which at first seemed mercilessly inconclusive.”⁵ Scholars today continue to praise the novel, whilst offering many different interpretations of the text. For some, social class and money are the major themes of the novel. According to Diane Trilling, “*The House of Mirth* is always and passionately a money story.”⁶ Wai-Chee Dimock similarly argues that the novel “raises the question of currency.”⁷ Other critics offer feminist readings of the text and illustrate how Lily Bart is indeed a victim of her society. Judith Fryer compares Lily to an “ornament,”⁸ and Judith Fetterley concludes, “the tragedy of Lily Bart is peculiarly the tragedy of an upperclass woman faced with ‘the temptation to be a beautiful object’ ... and destroyed by the consequences of that temptation.”⁹ Others oppose such a simplified view of Lily. Frances L. Restuccia finds that Lily is “duplicitous (that is double), if not multiple (hence cannot be reduced to an art object),”¹⁰ and Nancy Von Rosk describes her as, “a spectator as well as a spectacle, a New Woman as well as an embodiment of Victorian propriety....”¹¹ Although scholarship offers significant analyses and insights, the labour of Lily Bart has yet to be fully understood and appreciated in all its complexity. My examination of the novel will argue that Lily’s planning and strategizing to secure a husband, and later

⁴ “Fiction: *The House of Mirth*,” *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 1 Dec. 1905: 421, rpt. in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, eds. Kristin O. Lauer, Margaret P. Murray, and James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 116.

⁵ “*The House of Mirth*,” *Spectator* [London] 28 Oct. 1905: 657, rpt. in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, eds. Kristin O. Lauer, Margaret P. Murray, and James W. Tuttleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 113.

⁶ Diane Trilling, “*The House of Mirth* Revisited,” *American Scholar* 32.1 (1962-3): 122.

⁷ Wai-Chee Dimock, “Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*,” *PMLA* 100.5 (1985): 783.

⁸ Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 75.

⁹ Judith Fetterley, “The Temptation to be a Beautiful Object: Double Standard and Double Bind in *The House of Mirth*,” *Studies in American Fiction* 5.2 (1977): 200.

¹⁰ Frances L. Restuccia “The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton’s Feminism(s),” *Contemporary Literature* 28.2 (1987): 224.

¹¹ Nancy Von Rosk, “Spectacular Homes and Pastoral Theatres: Gender, Urbanity and Domesticity in *The House of Mirth*,” *Studies in the Novel* 33.3 (2001): 323.

provide for herself, is indeed affective labour. Furthermore, even though she attempts to labour manually for an income, her upper-class upbringing is detrimental and ultimately leads to her downfall. Although the novel is divided into two Books, the first focusing on Lily's search for a husband and the second on her social and financial decline, I will demonstrate that each book coincides with strategic phases of Lily's affective labours. In Book I Lily is directing her mental and emotional labour to find a wealthy suitor, and in Book II she labours to save herself and her reputation from her ultimate demise.

The opening of the novel allows the reader to see Lily through Lawrence Selden's eyes; he is in awe of her beauty and feminine charms, and at the same time, sympathises with her position. Wharton writes:

As he watched [Lily's] hand, polished as a bit of old ivory, with its slender pink nails, and the sapphire bracelet slipping over her wrist, he was struck with the irony of suggesting to her such a life as his cousin Gertrude Farish had chosen. She was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to her fate.¹²

There are two significant images in this passage. Firstly, the descriptions of Lily's beauty illustrate her femininity. Wharton's use of a simile, "hand, polished as a bit of old ivory," allows the reader to envision the creamy whiteness of Lily's skin, while the "slender pink nails" and the "bracelet slipping over her wrist" demonstrate the daintiness and girlishness of Lily's features. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the second half of the passage illustrates Wharton's interest in the idea of destiny or fate. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "fate" is "the principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are

¹² Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, ed. Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004) 10. All further references will be inserted parenthetically in the text.

unalterably predetermined from eternity; that which is destined or fated to happen.”¹³ By likening Lily’s “sapphire bracelet,” which also symbolizes wealth, to “manacles chaining her to her fate,” Wharton is suggesting that Lily’s future has already been determined. The phrase, “she was so evidently the victim of the civilization which has produced her,” establishes that Lily’s inevitable downfall is connected to socioeconomic factors. From this point on, the novel will illustrate Lily’s attempts to gain financial independence and autonomy through affective labour; ultimately, however, her “fate” can never be altered.

At the time this novel was published, women, including those of the middle classes, were still struggling to enter the labour market. Wharton and Chopin (as I have previously demonstrated) bring to our attention the desperation that existed for all women who struggled to attain financial autonomy, in every level of society. Lacking the skills necessary to succeed in the labour market, upper-class women were often expected to marry for financial gain, rather than solely for love. This is precisely the route Lily takes to secure her finances and social standing. Wharton addresses the predicaments women face in the following passage in which Lily and Selden engage in a conversation about marriage:

“Ah, there's the difference—a girl must [marry], a man may if he chooses.” She surveyed him critically. “Your coat's a little shabby—but who cares? It doesn't keep people from asking you to dine. If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop—and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership.”

¹³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

Selden glanced at her with amusement: it was impossible, even with her lovely eyes imploring him, to take a sentimental view of her case.

“Ah, well, there must be plenty of capital on the look-out for such an investment. Perhaps you'll meet your fate tonight at the Trenors.” (14-5)

Through these lines it is clear that monetary and social values are of extreme importance. It is also necessary to point out that Wharton never suggests love is an important factor for a marriage. As Annette Larson Benert asserts, “all the marriages in the novel are based thus on this exchange of financial for social capital.”¹⁴ The exchange Benert is referring to is a marriage contract between a man and a woman; a man provides the capital, while a woman, a good image, and of course good society. Although they may seem equally important, Wharton makes it clear that those who control finances have the power. The final sentence, “there must be plenty of capital on the look-out for such an investment,” supports Benert’s ideology and Irigaray’s assertion that women function as commodities.¹⁵ Men buy women according to what kind of investment they have to offer; in regards to Lily, she can provide men with her appearance and her relationship with the right kind of society. This is further demonstrated when Lily explains that there is a double standard: women, not men, are judged by their expensive “clothes.” The repetition of the words “shabby,” and “dingy,” and the negative tone Wharton elicits, illustrate the aversion to anything that can obstruct Lily’s chances from marrying successfully. Although it seems that Selden is unable to sympathise with Lily’s position, Wharton does want the reader to sympathise with women, and of course Lily. Deborah G. Lambert asserts that Wharton’s narrative style “prevents [the reader] from identifying with Lily’s goals and from sympathizing with her struggle.”¹⁶ She concludes by stating that the narrative also enables the reader to view Lily as “a shallow and manipulative

¹⁴ Annette Larson Benert, “The Geography of Gender in *The House of Mirth*,” *Studies in the Novel* 22.1 (1990): 27.

¹⁵ This is discussed in depth previously, in Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Deborah G. Lambert, “*The House of Mirth*: Readers Respond,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 4.1 (1985): 74.

character whose main goal is marriage to a rich man.”¹⁷ Yet, as we can see from the analysis of the previous passages, Wharton continually evokes sympathy for her protagonist.

Furthermore, in the following pages I will discuss the considerable amount of deliberation Lily’s actions entail, demonstrating that Lily certainly is not a “shallow” character.

The reader is introduced to Lily’s mental and emotional labours at the outset. When Lily visits Selden’s flat in the beginning of the novel, she asks him various questions on “Americana” (13). Her interest in such a boring subject becomes only when she meets Peter Gryce, a potential suitor. When her initial flirtations go unnoticed, she asks Gryce about his Americana collection:

There was, however, one topic she could rely on: one spring that she had only to touch to set his simple machinery in motion. She had refrained from touching it because it was a last resource, and she had relied on other arts to stimulate other sensations; but as a settled look of dullness began to creep over his candid features, she saw that extreme measures were necessary.... She questioned him intelligently, she heard him submissively; and, prepared for the look of lassitude which usually crept over his listeners' faces, he grew eloquent under her receptive gaze. The “points” she had had the presence of mind to glean from Selden, in anticipation of this very contingency, were serving her to such good purpose that she began to think her visit to him had been the luckiest incident of the day. She had once more shown her talent for profiting by the unexpected.... (22-3)

The word “art” has many definitions to do with “the application of skill to subjects of taste, such as poetry, music, dancing, the drama, oratory, literary composition, and the like.”¹⁸ The term also refers to “an acquired faculty of any kind; a power of doing anything wherein skill

¹⁷ Lambert 74.

¹⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

is attainable by study or practice.”¹⁹ Raymond Williams expands on the definition further by referring to a group of skills including “grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy,” as well as “painting, drawing, engraving and sculpture.”²⁰ It is evident that Lily isn’t creating art in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, the phrase “other arts” refers to the artistry and skill with which Lily attracts men. Although Lily depends on her beauty, she also considers and calculates ways to further attract Gryce’s interest. Having previously questioned Selden on Americana, Lily is equipped to partake in an intelligent conversation with Gryce; her efforts are rewarded with Gryce’s attention, and enthusiasm to talk about his hobbies. By using the term affective labour to denote Lily’s mental and creative calculations it becomes clear that her efforts are pointed towards securing a financially independent husband. Wharton writes: “Miss Bart had the gift of following an undercurrent of thought while she appeared to be sailing on the surface of conversation; and in this case her mental excursion took the form of a rapid survey of Mr. Percy Gryce’s future as combined with her own” (24). The phrase “mental excursion” is significant; even though Lily is outwardly conversing with Gryce, inwardly, she is envisioning what her future with him will look like if she is successful in her endeavour. As with the previous passage, the terms “talent” (23) and “gift” (24) refer to Lily’s skills that make her affective labour possible. However, once again the idea of fate is mirrored in the previous passage. The use of the term “contingency” (23), suggesting a future event (dependent on chance), is coupled with the phrase “luckiest incident” (23). Both terms demonstrate that fate and fortune intertwine, and that ultimately, Lily is powerless in altering her future.

Lily’s affective labour is also represented when Wharton revisits the double standard that exists for men and women in respect to marriage: “‘How impatient men are!’ Lily reflected. ‘All Jack has to do to get everything he wants is to keep quiet and let that girl marry

¹⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1991.

²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983) 41.

him; whereas I have to calculate and contrive, and retreat and advance, as if I were going through an intricate dance, where one misstep would throw me hopelessly out of time” (52). Here, the terms “calculate and contrive” suggest a kind of mental labour. Wharton compares the labour to an “intricate dance,” once again referring to the artistry that is displayed in attracting a suitor. The relationship between labour and art is further touched upon when Wharton writes about Lily’s “skilled manipulation of all the polished implements of her craft” (251). Lily depends on her mental and emotional abilities, and cultivates various tools and skills in her possession to attain a specific outcome. Although Lily’s affective labour is important in securing her future, she also depends on her beauty.

The idea that beauty is a physical attribute that has the power to attain certain goals is instilled in Lily early on by Mrs. Bart:

Only one thought consoled [Mrs. Bart], and that was the contemplation of Lily's beauty. She studied it with a kind of passion, as though it were some weapon she had slowly fashioned for her vengeance. It was the last asset in their fortunes.... She watched it jealously, as though it were her own property and Lily its mere custodian; and she tried to instil into the latter a sense of the responsibility that such a charge involved. She followed in imagination the career of other beauties, pointing out to her daughter what might be achieved through such a gift, and dwelling on the awful warning of those who, in spite of it, had failed to get what they wanted.... (37-8)

Wharton establishes marriage as a “career,” demonstrating that attracting and marrying a financially and socially, successful suitor is indeed an occupation for upper-class women. The terms “weapon,” “asset,” “property,” “charge,” and “gift,” all support the idea that beauty is valuable in the marriage market, and Lily is a commodity that must barter this asset to get what she wants. In fact, towards the end of the novel when Rosedale tells Lily why he would

be unable to marry her, Wharton defines Lily as “human merchandise” (271); this further exemplifies how Lily serves as a marriageable commodity. Although Lily is beautiful, her physical appearance on its own isn’t enough to attract potential suitors; she has to improve the value of this quality through affective labour: “Her beauty itself was not the mere ephemeral possession it might have been in the hands of inexperience: her skill in enhancing it, the care she took of it, the use she made of it, seemed to give it a kind of permanence. She felt she could trust it to carry her through to the end” (53-4).

Lily is aware that her beauty can help her attain her goals, and she does everything in her power to emphasise and preserve its appeal. This is most evident when Lily appears in the *tableaux vivants*:

[Lily] had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself.... The impulse to show herself in a splendid setting—she had thought for a moment of representing Tiepolo's Cleopatra—had yielded to the truer instinct of trusting to her unassisted beauty, and she had purposely chosen a picture without distracting accessories of dress or surroundings. Her pale draperies, and the background of foliage against which she stood, served only to relieve the long dryad-like curves that swept upward from her poised foot to her lifted arm. (144)

The phrase “artistic intelligence” suggests that Lily has an impressive knowledge of style, and a special understanding of presentation. She uses her mental and imaginative faculties in conjunction with her artistic skills to select clothes that emphasize her nymph-like appearance; her labour is successful and the audience is in awe of her beauty. Lily’s artfulness may not be equal to Avis’ artistic genius, yet, it demonstrates that *The House of Mirth* is, in a special sense, about art.

Due to the importance of physical appearance, it is obvious why Lily meticulously cares for her beauty, especially her face. Wharton portrays Lily's concern over developing any signs of aging in the following scene: "She rose, and walking across the floor stood gazing at herself for a long time in the brightly-lit mirror above the mantel-piece. The lines in her face came out terribly—she looked old; and when a girl looks old to herself, how does she look to other people?" (190). Lily is terrified of losing her beauty because it is her most precious asset; without it, she will be unable to compete in the marriage market, and her promising future will be lost.

Up to this point, Wharton has focused on Lily's active pursuit of a husband. Yet, in the following passage, the reader is made aware of Lily's inner conflict:

She was beginning to have fits of angry rebellion against fate, when she longed to drop out of the race and make an independent life for herself. But what manner of life would it be? She had barely enough money to pay her dress-makers' bills and her gambling debts; and none of the desultory interests which she dignified with the name of tastes was pronounced enough to enable her to live contentedly in obscurity. Ah, no—she was too intelligent not to be honest with herself. She knew that she hated dinginess as much as her mother had hated it, and to her last breath she meant to fight against it, dragging herself up again and again above its flood till she gained the bright pinnacles of success which presented such a slippery surface to her clutch. (42)

Despite Lily's exhaustion in fighting fate "again and again," she is unable to give up her efforts because she is in a precarious financial position. For Lily, autonomy is unattainable due to her social upbringing; her failure is not due to impoverishment but to being accustomed to upper-class privileges, and to her strong disdain for "dinginess." In addition, she has no concept of a working-class lifestyle and its day to day necessities. This is clear

from the way she considers her finances. If Lily wanted to live an independent life, she would be contemplating how she can make enough money to pay for room and board. Instead, she worries about having enough money to pay for her various luxuries: her “dress-makers’ bill and her gambling debts.”

Despite her resolution to avoid poverty, Lily is still unable to commit herself to marrying for financial gain: “The fact that [Lily’s] life had never satisfied her proved that she was made for better things. She might have married more than once—the conventional rich marriage which she had been taught to consider the sole end of existence—but when the opportunity came she had always shrunk from it” (166). Lily’s hesitation in marrying for money indicates that she would rather marry for love. However, even though she has the opportunity to marry Selden, she is unable to because he doesn’t have the financial and social position she wishes to attain. By the end of the novel Wharton illustrates Lily’s regret in her choices: “[Lily’s] voice had gathered strength, and she looked [Selden] gravely in the eyes as she continued. “Once—twice—you gave me the chance to escape from my life, and I refused it: refused it because I was a coward” (326). Lily has lacked the courage to defy the conventions and expectations set by upper-class society. This scene also complicates Wharton’s view of fate and destiny; perhaps if Lily had married for love from the beginning, her demise could have been avoided.

Eventually Lily loses the financial and emotional support of her friends and family. She is disinherited from Mrs. Peniston’s will, and only expects to attain ten thousand dollars from the will. Yet, she is unable to use that money to support herself because she is intent on using it to repay Gus Trenor for his loans. Having no other ways to maintain her lifestyle, and upon the suggestion of Gerty Farish and Carry Fisher, she begins to labour in the work room of Mme. Regina’s millinery establishment. As expected, her upbringing proves to be detrimental to her efforts:

It was bitter to acknowledge her inferiority even to herself, but the fact had been brought home to her that as a bread-winner she could never compete with professional ability. Since she had been brought up to be ornamental, she could hardly blame herself for failing to serve any practical purpose; but the discovery put an end to her consoling sense of universal efficiency. (315)

Lily is viewed as “ornamental,” because she lacks any real skills that can aid her in the labour market. According to Fetterley, “as an upper-class woman, Lily has, of course, been in no way prepared for economic independence; her attempts to turn her ornamental talents into realizable economic value fail; nor can she hope to compete in the menial work of the business with the women who have been trained to it from youth.”²¹ Lily’s lack of training shows in the work she is expected to complete; even after months of labouring, “her untutored fingers were still blundering over the rudiments of the trade” (302).

Ultimately Lily is fired from her job with no other financial prospect in place. Exhausted physically from her manual labour, and unable to formulate a plan due to mental and emotional fatigue, she gives up on thinking about her future: “[Lily] felt tired and confused: it was an effort to put her thoughts together” (303). In an effort to temporarily stop her incessant mental calculations, she uses chloral to make her sleep:

Gradually, to be sure, the stress of the old thoughts would return; but at least they did not importune her waking hour. The drug gave her a momentary illusion of complete renewal, from which she drew strength to take up her daily work. The strength was more and more needed as the perplexities of her future increased. (312)

Her dependence on the drug increases as her future deteriorates, and the fast-paced narrative of the final chapters indicate that her end is near. Nevertheless, Lily is unable to sleep until

²¹ Fetterley 202.

she settles her affairs: she needs to repay Mr. Trenor, and to do something with the incriminating letters she holds that confirm the affair between Mrs. Dorset and Selden. Resolving to protect Selden's reputation, even if it means she gives up her chances of re-joining the upper classes (by way of marriage to Rosedale), Lily burns the evidence of the affair. Her final objective is made possible when the money from her aunt is finally credited to her bank account; Lily immediately writes a cheque to Mr. Trenor, absolving her debt.

Despite all her efforts, Lily faces impending poverty. Yet, she hardly concerns herself with her financial troubles; instead, she considers the gloomy possibility of continuing her life in solitude:

She had a sense of deeper impoverishment—of an inner destitution compared to which outward conditions dwindled into insignificance. It was indeed miserable to be poor—to look forward to a shabby, anxious middle-age, leading by dreary degrees of economy and self-denial to gradual absorption in the dingy communal existence of the boarding-house. But there was something more miserable still—it was the clutch of solitude at her heart, the sense of being swept like a stray uprooted growth down the heedless current of the years. (338)

Lily has given up on affective labour because she knows she will never achieve self-fulfilment and autonomy of any kind, or even attain the privileged lifestyle she had been accustomed to previously. Furthermore, she lacks financial and social support, and has no other incentive to continue her fight against fate. It is easy to understand then why she decides to take a few extra drops of chloral; the potential overdose doesn't scare her because she has nothing left to risk. Although critics have debated whether or not Lily's death is accidental, one should take into consideration the influence of fate. Wharton describes her death as finally attaining "the rest she so desperately needed..." (341). The ambiguous nature

of “rest” may allow the possibility of an accidental overdose, yet Wharton has established from the outset that Lily’s demise is determined.

Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* is a seminal text primarily because it reveals the struggles upper-class women had to face when trying to ascertain independence. Two novels that take a different approach in exposing women’s struggles are Mary Hunter Austin’s *A Woman of Genius* and Willa Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*. Both novels follow the lives and successes of two female artists. Although Wharton has established that Lily has her own “genius” (73), Austin and Cather portray a different kind of genius, one that exists within the female artist. For ease of reference, the novels will be examined chronologically.

Mary Hunter Austin was a popular writer, feminist, social activist, and environmentalist of the early twentieth century. Although she wrote over thirty novels, as well as numerous essays and short stories, she was best known for her works about the American Southwest. Unfortunately, today most of Austin’s works are out of print, and only a handful of critics have written about her life and literary career.²² For these reasons I will first offer a brief summary of Austin’s life and career before turning to *A Woman of Genius*.

Mary Hunter was born in Carlinville, Illinois in 1868. Upon graduating from Blackburn College in 1888, she moved to southern California with her widowed mother and brother. There she taught until she married Wallace Stafford Austin in 1891. Unfortunately the marriage suffered from financial trouble and the birth of her mentally disabled daughter, a result of her “venereal-diseased husband.”²³ She eventually left her husband to pursue a career in writing (although she didn’t divorce him until 1914) and placed her daughter in an institution for better care.

²² Some comprehensive studies of her life and works include T.M. Pearce, *Mary Hunter Austin* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc, 1965); Heike Schaefer, *Mary Austin’s Regionalism: Reflections on Gender, Genre, and Geography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Esther Lanigan Stineman, *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).

²³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 285.

Austin published her first work, *The Land of Little Rain*, in 1903; it is a collection of essays, “careful sketches of the nature, personalities, and folkways of the [Sierras].”²⁴ Her later works, *The Basket Woman* (1904), *Isidro* (1905), *The Flock* (1906) *Santa Lucia* (1908), and *Lost Borders, The People of the Dessert* (1909) also centre on the American Southwest. As Nancy Porter asserts, “in her early stories and novels, Austin drew her subject matter from her own, at times mystical contact with the land and the miners, herders, desperados, entrepreneurs, Mexicans, and Indians who moved across [the region].”²⁵ The success of *The Land of Little Rain* gave Austin the financial independence she needed to leave her husband, and move first to Los Angeles, and then to Carmel, California, where she lived and wrote for over a decade. According to Janis P. Stout, in Carmel she became “an early member of the writers’ colony there that included Jack London, poet George Sterling ... and Lincoln Steffens.”²⁶ In California she also met and befriended Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a figure who deeply influenced her feminist ideology. She continued her literary career in Europe, where she surrounded herself with many influential writers of her time, such as H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, and May Sinclair. After travelling to England and Italy, she eventually relocated to New York. There she became active in the feminist movement, and published many essays supporting feminist causes, such as suffrage, sexual liberation, and birth control. Austin’s feminist ideology is most evident in *A Woman of Genius*, and *No. 26 Jayne Street* (1920), novels she completed while living in New York. In 1924 Austin moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she lived until her death in 1934. Her last notable work was her autobiography, *Earth Horizon*, published in 1932.

²⁴ Nancy Porter, afterword, *A Woman of Genius*, by Mary Austin (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1985) 298.

²⁵ Porter 299.

²⁶ Janis P. Stout, “Mary Austin’s Feminism: A Reassessment,” *Studies in the Novel* 30.1 (1998): 80.

A Woman of Genius was published in 1912 by Doubleday, Page and Company, after being “turned down by the Century Company and Macmillan.”²⁷ Thought to be loosely based on Austin’s life, the novel is a first person narrative of Olivia Lattimore, a woman who leaves her husband after the death of her child, to pursue self-fulfilment through a career in acting. Despite Austin’s reputation and previous success with nature novels, most critics either ignored or slated the novel for its feminist ideology and overt sexuality. For example, the *Boston Evening Transcript* criticises the novel’s premise: “With all Mrs. Austin’s endeavours to make it appear that her characters live, her story lacks verity.... As a whole, *A Woman of Genius*, in spite of the undeniable cleverness, is as extravagant as its extravagant title.”²⁸ The *New York Times* is one of the few newspapers that offers a favourable review, and yet, includes a warning:

Mrs. Austin tells the story brilliantly, with a rich, deep knowledge of human nature, and with an individuality in her way of looking at things that affords the reader many a delightful surprise.... But she needs to beware, lest it lead her into those cryptic ways which are a snare to the feet of the novelist who wishes to be read by any but the most intellectually select.²⁹

Other papers of the time merely comment on the novel’s subject matter. For example, the reviewer for *The Sun* writes, “This work differs widely from Mrs. Austin’s previous delineations of the deserts and mining camps of far Western life, and portrays the struggles of a woman of genius and the development of the woman herself, with an unusual elimination of material details of environment.”³⁰ *The Woman’s Journal* offers a simple promotion: “A very able and realistic statement in story form, of the difficulty presented to a woman of genius, under present social customs, when she finds herself practically forced to choose between

²⁷Karen S. Langlois, “Mary Austin’s *A Woman of Genius*: The Text, the Novel and the Problem of Male Publishers and Critics and Female Authors,” *Journal of American Culture* 15.2 (1992): 18.

²⁸ “Books of the Day,” *Boston Evening Transcript* [Boston] 28 Aug. 1912: 20.

²⁹ “A Fine Novel,” *New York Times* [New York] 25 Aug. 1912: 460.

³⁰ “New Books this Fall Promise Big Season: Fine Array of Fiction,” *The Sun* [New York] 31 Aug. 1912: 13.

love and art.”³¹ Not only did the novel suffer from criticism, but Doubleday dropped the novel “four months later when the wife of one of the publishers complained that Olivia’s behaviour was ‘immoral.’”³² Despite it being reprinted by Houghton Mifflin in 1917, coinciding with the entry of the United States to the first World War, *A Woman of Genius* failed to garner any interest until after Austin’s death.³³

In the 1980s Austin’s works gained renewed critical attention, albeit not as extensive as those of other women writers of the same period (e.g. Kate Chopin), and *A Woman of Genius* was established as one of her most important feminist works. Nancy Morrow discusses *A Woman of Genius* alongside Anne Douglas Sedgwick’s *Tante* (1911), asserting that both novels “are concerned not only with the obstacles that the protagonists face in achieving success as artists, but also with the even more formidable obstacles to personal fulfilment.”³⁴ Janis P. Stout offers a similar analysis and suggests that the text is based on “self-fulfilment and self-definition”³⁵ for the protagonist. In contrast, other critics focus on the sexuality displayed in the novel. According to Dale M. Bauer, *A Woman of Genius* “marks a transition from the old way of seeing sex power—as a dangerous and instinctive mode of women’s actions in the world—to a new way of seeing sex power as instrumental in attaining women’s possibilities.”³⁶ Similarly, Edward Wagenknecht asserts that “on its deepest level the book is a study of creative power, of its connection with sexual power, of how it is differentiated from sexual power, and of the conflict between art and love.”³⁷ Nancy Porter even goes so far as to conclude that “in addressing a range of questions about women’s sexuality, including its connection with the creation of art, *A Woman of Genius* makes a

³¹ “New Books out for Christmas,” *The Woman's Journal* [Boston] 21 Dec. 1912: 407.

³² Langlois 85.

³³ J. Wilkes Berry, “Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934),” *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 2.2 (1969): 129.

³⁴ Nancy Morrow, “The Artist as Heroine and Anti-Heroine in Mary Austin’s *A Woman of Genius* and Anne Douglas Sedgwick’s *Tante*,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 22.2 (1990): 17.

³⁵ Stout 87.

³⁶ Dale M. Bauer, *Sex Expression: And American Writers 1860-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 123.

³⁷ Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel: From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Holt, 1952) 233.

singular contribution to the genre.”³⁸ In addition to the many different insights scholarship offers, Austin’s novel is significant in that it addresses many feminist issues, and is one of the few where the protagonist achieves self-fulfilment and professional success.

The opening pages present the basis of the novel: “This is the story of the struggle between a Genius for Tragic Acting and the daughter of a County Clerk, with the social ideal of Taylorville, Ohianna, for the villain.”³⁹ Olivia’s struggle in trying to manage her career with her domestic life, despite the outrage of those around her (the townspeople, her friends, her mother and her husband), is the dilemma many women were facing at the turn of the century. Although I will examine *A Woman of Genius*, I will focus specifically on Olivia’s need for personal fulfilment, and how she achieves it through affective labour (acting).

For simplicity’s sake I will divide the novel into two parts. The first half of the novel concentrates on Olivia’s childhood in Taylorville, Ohianna, and her subsequent marriage, out of convenience rather than love, to Tommy Bettersworth. The second half focuses on her career as an actress and her life in Chicago, New York, and London. As with other novels I have discussed in previous chapters, the reader is acquainted with the protagonist’s reluctance to follow conventional ideals at the outset.⁴⁰ Olivia feels hostility towards her brother who has several advantages and freedoms simply because of his sex. Austin writes:

At times when I felt this going on in our house, there rose up like a wisp of fog between me and the glittering promise of the future, a kind of horror of the destiny of women; to defer and adjust, to maintain the attitude of acquiescence

³⁸ Porter 317. It is important to note that the “genre” Porter refers to in this quotation is that of New Woman fiction, or simply the number of texts in the late nineteenth century that explore women’s work. Porter specifically mentions Rebecca Harding Davis, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Kate Chopin, and Sarah Grand, to name a few, as Austin’s literary predecessors.

³⁹ Mary Austin, *A Woman of Genius*, ed. Nancy Porter (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press 1985) 83. All further references will be inserted parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁰ For American fiction, see the chapters on Louisa May Alcott’s *Work* and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ *The Story of Avis*. For British fiction, see the chapter on New Woman fiction (Sarah Grand and Mona Caird).

toward opinions and capabilities that had nothing more to recommend them than merely that they were a man's! (44)

Olivia's "horror" is towards the angel in the house ideal that women still were expected to uphold. Despite the "fog" that obstructs her future, she ultimately surpasses all difficulties and achieves success.

Olivia's road to self-fulfilment begins as her child's life ends: "Very closely on the loss of my baby, of which I have spared you as much as possible, came crowding the opening movement of my artistic career" (83). Bored and unhappy with domestic life, she is driven to look elsewhere for stimulation and self-fulfilment. Her artistic gift and "the insight and passion" (97) she feels while acting propel her to consider the stage as a profession. As her artistic aspirations grow, so do her desires to act:

All this time, in spite of my recent revulsion from it, I was consumed with the desire of acting. My new-found faculty ached for use. It woke me in the night and wasted me; I had wild thoughts such as men have in the grip of an unjustifiable passion. All my imaginings at that time were of events, untoward, fantastic, which should somehow throw me back upon the stage without the necessity on my part, of a moral conclusion. (126-7)

Here, the passion Olivia feels towards acting is likened to an expression of sexuality. Through acting Olivia attains a sexual power she previously never had. Austin previously alludes to this idea when Cecilia Brune, a fellow actress, asserts that "the quintessence of art [is] to attract males and keep them dangling" (95). The sexual undertones associated with acting are precisely why the stage was viewed as inappropriate for women. According to Faye E. Dudden, the actress has always been "associated with sexuality and immorality;"⁴¹

⁴¹ Faye E. Dudden, *Women in American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 2.

sexuality, because acting “is an embodied art,”⁴² and immorality, because the nature of the labour is likened to a prostitute’s (the actress, like the prostitute labours in the public sphere for money). Furthermore, as Albert Auster asserts, “the easy and constant accessibility of actress to actor necessitated by work further broke down the notion of separate spheres.”⁴³ For Olivia, the vocation is especially challenging because she is already married. Not only is her reputation at stake when she leaves her husband for months at a time to take part in various productions, but she also lacks the support of her friends and family.

A woman’s struggle in balancing domesticity and art is also evident in *The Story of Avis*. Both Avis and Olivia have an overpowering need to display their passion and emotions, and attain self-fulfilment; they attain their goals through affective labour. However, the novels’ similarities end here; Austin allows Olivia to attain success as an actress once Tommy dies, an opportunity Phelps doesn’t give her protagonist.⁴⁴ In fact, Olivia is a much stronger protagonist; she actively fights conventions, and in the end, chooses her career over love.

Throughout her career Olivia has been guided by various mentors: “The Hardings taught me my way about the professional world, the management of my gift [and] its market value...” (132). In addition to learning the economic side of the vocation, she also works on her “stage craft” (132) by physically and emotionally engaging with each role. According to Dudden “actors and actresses stood alone to create their effects with unaided expression, posture, gesture and above all with the voice.”⁴⁵ An actor’s craft is ultimately dependent on the skills and techniques used to emulate each character as authentically as possible. By using the term affective labour to denote Olivia’s emotional and mental labours, her efforts can be recognised and appreciated. Olivia’s affective labour is depicted in the following passage:

⁴² Dudden 2.

⁴³ Albert Auster, *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theatre, 1890-1920* (New York: Praeger, 1984) 57.

⁴⁴ By the time Avis’ husband dies, her creativity has been completely diminished and she is unable to paint.

⁴⁵ Dudden 15-6.

I needed something then to account, as I proceeded with my part, for the extraordinary richness of power, the delicacy and precision with which I put it over line by line to my audience. I played, oh, I played! I felt the audience breathing in the pauses like the silent wood; the lights went gold and crimson and the young dreams were singing. (261)

The audience's reaction to Olivia's performance demonstrates the ability she has in engaging and extracting their emotions. She passionately embodies her character and enunciates each memorized line with "delicacy and precision." It is important to establish that Olivia's greatness is also due to the natural instinct which allows her to portray her character with ease and with precision. Austin's use of the word "power," which Stout defines as "a combination of passionate commitment, intelligent understanding, and personal presence of authority"⁴⁶ in one's performance, further demonstrates Olivia's artistic genius. Through affective labour (mental and emotional) Olivia is able to achieve social and financial success as an actress, and perhaps more importantly, attain self-fulfilment.

As the novel comes to a close, Olivia appears to have successfully combined her career with love. Her acting career is fuelled by the passion she feels in her personal life as she has a romantic relationship with her childhood sweetheart, Helmeth Garett. Yet, Austin foreshadows the difficulty in having love and work coexist when Olivia asserts: "I suppose that in as much as I had a man's attitude toward work, I had come unconsciously to the man's habit of keeping love and my career, in two watertight compartments. I found I was not able to think of them as having much to do with one another" (247-8). Olivia's inability to balance love and her career is exposed when Helmeth proposes marriage, and forces her to choose between wife and artist. Despite the strong love Olivia feels for Helmeth, she can't imagine a

⁴⁶ Janis P. Stout "Willa Cather and the Performing Arts," *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather*, ed. Marilee Lindemann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 106.

life without her career: “I am an actress and I can’t leave off being one just by saying so” (270).

As with many other women writers of the period, Austin was unable to resolve the problem of combining self-fulfilment, a career, and marriage in *A Woman of Genius*. Nevertheless, her approach to the woman question was something new. The novel ends with Olivia considering a marriage to her friend and playwright Jerry McDermot, not out of love, but out of mutual respect for the craft. In this way Olivia manages to maintain her gift and her career without sacrificing her self-fulfilment and autonomy.

A similar novel to Austin’s *A Woman of Genius*, and perhaps a more popular one, is *The Song of the Lark* by Willa Cather. The novel chronicles the life and artistic development of Thea Kronberg from childhood, through her success as an opera singer. Widely known for basing her novels on the American frontier, as with *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Antonia* (1918), Cather was also a journalist, even writing for *McClure’s Magazine*. Like Wharton, she was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1922 (for her novel *One of Ours*), and spent most of her life living in New York. Due to her popularity and regard as one of the important women writers of the twentieth century, I will avoid giving a detailed biography and instead focus on *The Song of the Lark*.

The Song of the Lark was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1915. At the time of its publication, the novel was received with admiration. The *Evening Public Ledger* praises the way Cather realistically portrays the struggles women singers experienced in their careers: “*The Song of the Lark* tells a strong and moving story of the path to fame in the musical world.”⁴⁷ It concludes by stating, “Miss Cather has surveyed it accurately, this route

⁴⁷ “Other New Fiction,” *Evening Public Ledger* [Pennsylvania] 22 Oct. 1915: 6.

to operatic glory traversed by American girls who sing; has marked the turns, the ruts, the rocks that lead to the heights.”⁴⁸ According to *The New York Globe*,

It has the artistic and literary merit of her earlier book, *O Pioneers!* but it is an immeasurably bigger and richer story. In fact, *The Song of the Lark* is one of the most interesting, really American novels that has been written in this country in a long time, and it will match up with the best work that has recently been done in England.⁴⁹

The New York Tribune has a similar outlook and asserts that *The Song of the Lark* “is likely to be adjudged the best American novel of a year that has produced so much of excellent native fiction.”⁵⁰ Contemporary scholars also regard *The Song of the Lark* in a positive light.

According to Edward Wagenknecht, “it remains one of the best studies we have in fiction of the artistic life of a great stage artist.”⁵¹ For Hermione Lee, *The Song of the Lark* is Cather’s “most personal and revealing novel; it is a splendid source book for biographers because so many of the details of Thea’s early life are Cather’s.”⁵² In general, scholarship focuses on Cather’s representation of the female artist and Thea Kronberg’s sexual and spiritual awakening. For example, Linda Pannill focuses on Cather’s portrayal of the woman artists in the novel:

[Cather] had arrived at a conception of the woman artist which reconciled the conflict because she insisted on the artist’s dedication to art rather than to conventional (and conflicting) roles while at the same time she conceived of the woman artist in distinctly ‘womanly’ terms—as an instrument, instrument of her own genius.⁵³

⁴⁸ “Other New Fiction,” *Evening Public Ledger* [Pennsylvania] 22 Oct. 1915: 6.

⁴⁹ “Books of the Week Seen in Review and Comment,” *The Sun* [New York] 6 Nov. 1915: 8.

⁵⁰ “Christmas Books: A General Survey,” *The New York Tribune* [New York] 4 Dec. 1915: 11.

⁵¹ Wagenknecht 326.

⁵² Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up* (London: Virago Press, 1997) 120.

⁵³ Linda Pannill, “Willa Cather’s Artist Heroines,” *Women’s Studies* 11 (1984): 223.

Debra Cumberland explores the association between vocal theory and “Thea’s artistic and sexual growth,”⁵⁴ and Ellen Moers focuses on Thea’s sexual and artistic awakening set in “the most thoroughly elaborated female landscape in literature.”⁵⁵ However, Mary Titus takes a different approach and argues that “the novel is as much or more about men and their experience of female creative power as it is about its creative heroine.”⁵⁶ Although these critics offer valuable interpretations of the novel, I will focus solely on Thea’s affective labour, which is centred on achieving self-fulfilment, autonomy, and success as an opera singer.

For those unfamiliar with *The Song of the Lark*, the heroine, Thea Kronberg, is a determined pianist who leaves her hometown and goes to Chicago to pursue a career in music. By the end of the novel she achieves self-fulfilment and success under the guidance of various mentors, not as a pianist, but as a powerful opera singer. I will first concentrate on Cather’s portrayal of Thea’s gift, and then focus on the affective labour that makes her success possible.

The opening of the novel is especially important as it introduces the reader to Thea as a child and establishes her gifted nature. When Thea falls sick with pneumonia, Dr Archie is called to the Kronberg house to examine and treat her. It is here that he realizes Thea is special: “As he pushed back the hair that had fuzzed down over her eyebrows, he felt her head thoughtfully with the tips of his fingers. No, he couldn’t say that it was different from any other child’s head, though he believed that there was something very different about her.”⁵⁷ Dr. Archie may be unable to determine what exactly is different in Thea, yet he is certain that she is unique physically and mentally. Thea’s uniqueness is revisited later on in

⁵⁴ Debra Cumberland, “A Struggle for Breath: Contemporary Vocal Theory in Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 28.2 (1996): 60.

⁵⁵ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (London: Women’s Press, 1978) 258.

⁵⁶ Mary Titus, “Cather’s Creative Women and DuMaurier’s Cozy Men: *The Song of the Lark* and *Trilby*,” *Modern Language Studies* 24.2 (1994): 33.

⁵⁷ Willa Cather, *The Song of the Lark* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004) 6. All further references will be inserted parenthetically in the text.

the novel when she studies under Andor Harsanyi's guidance in Chicago. Not only does Harsanyi feel that Thea has "a richly gifted nature" (113), but he mirrors Dr. Archie's observation as he studies Thea's profile: "Where had he seen a head like it before?" (118). It soon becomes clear to him that Thea's physical appearance has been indicating she has a strong singing voice all along:

Everything about her indicated it,—the big mouth, the wide jaw and chin, the strong white teeth, the deep laugh. The machine was so simple and strong, seemed to be so easily operated. She sang from the bottom of herself. Her breath came from down where her laugh came from.... A relaxed throat, a voice that lay on the breath, that had never been forced off the breath; it rose and fell in the air-column like the little balls which are put to shine in the jet of a fountain. The voice did not thin as it went up; the upper tones were as full and rich as the lower, produced in the same way and as unconsciously, only with deeper breath. (123)

In this passage Thea's singing ability is depicted as effortless and entirely natural; her throat is "relaxed," she never has to force "off the breath," and the whole process seems like an unconscious effort. The phrase "the machine was so simple and strong, seemed to be so easily operated" further illustrates Thea's innate talent.

Despite years of training, Thea never feels a passion for the piano as she does with singing:

She had always told herself that she studied piano to fit herself to be a music teacher. But she never asked herself why she was studying voice. Her voice, more than any other part of her, had to do with that confidence, that sense of wholeness and inner well-being that she had felt at moments ever since she could remember. (140-1)

Here Cather demonstrates the difference between a mere vocation and one that is directed towards self-fulfilment. For Thea, singing is a way in which she can express herself and achieve happiness. Although Cather doesn't use the term "genius" to denote Thea's musical ability, like Austin's Olivia, she too is a gifted artist.

As with Olivia, Thea's genius alone isn't enough; she needs to exercise her talents and labour incessantly to achieve success. Early on Harsanyi compliments Thea's work ethic: "The best thing about her preparation was that she had developed an unusual power of work. He noticed at once her way of charging at difficulties. She ran to meet them as if they were foes she had long been seeking, seized them as if they were destined for her and she for them" (113-4). By using affective labour to denote the "work" Cather is referring to, we as readers and critics are better placed to appreciate Thea's mental and emotional labour. The comparison made between "difficulties" and "foes" demonstrates Thea's strong drive to eliminate any obstacles that stand in her way of attaining self-fulfilment. Nevertheless, Thea inevitably suffers from overwork:

She sometimes came home from a late lesson so exhausted that she could eat no supper. If she tried to eat, she was ill afterward. She used to throw herself upon the bed and lie there in the dark, not thinking, not feeling, but evaporating. That same night, perhaps, she would waken up rested and calm, and as she went over her work in her mind, the passages seemed to become something of themselves, to take a sort of pattern in the darkness. (115)

Thea's determination to succeed is apparent as she continues to labour mentally despite her exhaustion. Although Cather has established Thea's musical gift, Thea can't achieve self-fulfilment until she discovers her true artistic self. This is made possible when Thea visits Panther Canyon, Arizona, as a way to rehabilitate her deteriorating health.

Thea's visit to Panther Canyon proves significant for a number of reasons. Not only does she consummate her romantic relationship with Fred Ottenburg, but most importantly, she has a sexual and spiritual awakening facilitated by the landscape. As Thea goes swimming in a quiet stream one morning, she suddenly has an epiphany: "in singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals" (195). According to Pannill, "in a moment of revelation and spiritual rebirth, Thea, bathing in the stream, sees that as an artist she is the instrument for the feeling which is both the shared essence of human life and at the same time her own second self or genius...."⁵⁸ Thea also discovers that she can attain self-fulfilment by instilling her passion in her work: "She had not been singing much, but she knew that her voice was more interesting than it had ever been before. She had begun to understand that—with her, at least—voice was, first of all, vitality; a lightness in the body and a driving power in the blood. If she had that, she could sing" (196). Once Thea realises that she has the ability to imagine and create, she leaves to study in Germany, away from any distractions. The reader is reacquainted with Thea ten years later, when she has finally achieved success in her career.

Although some critics view the last section of the novel as "hurried and blurred,"⁵⁹ it is crucially important in that Cather establishes what life is like for Thea as a famous opera singer. While Thea's awakening has been explored in the chapters taking place in Panther Canyon, the reader has yet to see how she uses her artistic genius to infuse passion in her singing and emotionally affect the audience. Cather portrays Thea's artistic power at a performance attended by Harsanyi. At its conclusion a journalist approaches him hoping to gain an understanding of Thea's genius:

The journalist scented copy and was eager. "Yes, Harsanyi. You know all about her. What's her secret?"

⁵⁸ Pannill 229.

⁵⁹ Louis Auchincloss, *Pioneers & Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965) 101.

Harsanyi rumbled his hair irritably and shrugged his shoulders. "Her secret? It is every artist's secret,"—he waved his hand,—"passion. That is all. It is an open secret, and perfectly safe. Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials." (305)

As with Olivia, Thea's strength lies in being able to genuinely convey passion through her art, something she is able to achieve through affective labour.

The ending of the novel illustrates Thea's devotion to her career. In a conversation with Dr. Archie near the end of the novel Thea explains:

"My dear doctor, I don't have [a personal life]. Your work becomes your personal life. You are not much good until it does. It's like being woven into a big web. You can't pull away, because all your little tendrils are woven into the picture. It takes you up, and uses you, and spins you out; and that is your life. Not much else can happen to you." (291)

Whereas women in earlier fiction have been consumed with their domestic responsibilities, Cather presents the opportunity for women to have a choice of working towards a career. In this way, *A Woman of Genius* and *The Song of the Lark* demonstrate women's progress in professional fields. Yet, it is important to point out that Thea and Olivia develop their careers and attain self-fulfilment only by rejecting marriage. Austin and Cather were unable to go beyond existing constructs and imagine a world where women could balance domesticity with their careers. Nevertheless, their efforts are undoubtedly valuable and their optimism for the future of women is paramount.

Conclusion

In the fiction of to-day women are continually taking larger place in the action of the story. They are given personal characteristics beyond those of physical beauty. And they are no longer content simply to be: they do. They are showing qualities of bravery, endurance, strength, foresight, and power for the swift execution of well-conceived plans. They have ideas and purposes of their own; and even when, as in so many cases described by the more reactionary novelists, the efforts of the heroine are shown to be entirely futile, and she comes back with a rush to the self-effacement of marriage with economic dependence, still the efforts were there.⁴³⁶

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics*

In the excerpt above, Gilman addresses the progress made in society and literature. By the turn of the century, women had gained many opportunities socially and professionally. The fiction of this time mirrored these advancements, and writers were more likely to represent their heroines as strong, motivated, and career-focused characters, than as passive, submissive and domestic creatures. Nevertheless, as Gilman notes, some writers still struggled to give their heroines happy endings. For instance, Chopin's *The Awakening* and Wharton's *The House of Mirth* conclude with their protagonists' deaths, while other novels, such as Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee*, end with the heroine's marriage. Although these texts are certainly exceptions, most writers were unable to comprehend how a woman could resolve the problem of marriage and career, and thus ended their works with the protagonist choosing one, or the other; for example, in Austin's *A Woman of Genius* and Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, both protagonists prosper in their careers when they reject love.

Nonetheless, and as Gilman asserts, "the efforts were there."

The writers examined in this project all reject the angel in the house ideal along with prescribed notions of domesticity, and instead represent women as seeking self-fulfilment and autonomy through professional careers. Additionally, the texts and their representations of women offer many insights into patterns of work, especially regarding affective labour. For

⁴³⁶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998) 75.

example, in Grand's *The Beth Book*, Beth's success in writing and orating is due to her affective labours. In Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale*, Sophie's mental labour enables her to become a prosperous businesswoman. In Fern's *Ruth Hall*, Ruth has a flourishing writing career due to affective labour. Similarly, in Austin's *A Woman of Genius* and Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, Olivia and Thea attain stardom on the stage through their creative, emotional, and artistic labours.

Within this range of texts, however, there are also endings that are problematic. In Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, Hadria fails to compose musical works when she is dragged back to the drudgery of domesticity; similarly, in Phelps' *The Story of Avis*, Avis' creative genius is stifled by her marriage. Furthermore, and as I previously pointed out, Edna in Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Lily in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* commit suicide when they realise they will never be able to attain self-fulfilment. Although these endings are ominous, these texts have value, because they demonstrate the need for further improvement in women's social and professional lives.

The texts in this study demonstrate women's journeys in transcending societal restrictions and attaining self-fulfilment, and eventually financial independence, through affective labour. By looking at canonical and non-canonical works in both British and American literary traditions, I hope to have presented a comprehensive account of women's professional lives, in all areas of social standing. Gaskell, in particular, writes from a perspective sympathetic to working-class struggle, addressing the many industrial labours her characters take part in. Gissing's works seek to represent both working and middle-class lives, while New Woman fiction focuses on educated women of the middle and upper classes. In a similar vein, Fern and Alcott represent the working girls of mid-nineteenth-century America, and Chopin and Wharton deal exclusively with the elite.

Although the works discussed in this project are by no means an exhaustive list of works published between 1848 and 1915, they do provide insights into women's labours and self-development. Additionally, they all try to look beyond the limiting conditions of their own time by imagining alternate lives for their characters. Nevertheless, it would be exceptionally rewarding to further examine the portrayal of women and their labours, affective and traditional, in nineteenth-and-twentieth century-works. For instance, in British fiction, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), depicts a teacher, and in *The Daisy Chain* (1856), Charlotte Mary Yonge presents the struggles a woman faces when sacrificing her studies for domesticity. Menie Muriel Dowie in *Gallia* (1895) and H. G. Wells in *Ann Veronica* (1909) portray the lives of female students. Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) follows the life of a journalist. In *Night and Day* (1919), Virginia Woolf contrasts the very different lives of a married woman and a suffragette. Similarly, in American fiction, Augusta Jane Evans portrays two women and their service in the Civil War, in *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice* (1864). Lillie Devereux Blake depicts women's many different labours in *Fettered for Life* (1874), among them a suffragist, a seamstress, a washerwoman, and a physician. The protagonists in Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Dr. Zay* (1882) are female doctors. Elizabeth Robins in *The Convert* (1907) represents suffragettes, and Dorothy Richardson describes the life of a working girl in *The Long Day* (1905). These examples are just a few of the texts that can be reconsidered through the lens of affective labour, to gain new insights into the various ways in which the lives of women are depicted in fiction.

In this project I have re-established previously overlooked novels and re-evaluated canonical and non-canonical works through the lens of affective labour. Despite the small number of texts discussed in this study, they do represent a wide-ranging depiction of women's mental, creative, emotional, artistic, and even, domestic labours. I hope that this

project will spark an interest in further comparative studies between British and American fiction, and motivate others to extend the examinations of patterns of work to include works from the mid-twentieth century through to the present day.

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